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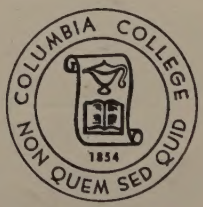

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THE SWORD OF YOUTH

This was the boy's war out there on the fields amid the dark shadows of the ground and amid the white shadows of his spirit.

THE SWORD OF YOUTH

O virtuous fight!
When right with right wars, who shall be most right!
Troilus and Cressida.

BY

JAMES LANE ALLEN

Author of "A Cathedral Singer," "The Bride of the Mistletoe," "The Kentucky Cardinal," "The Choir Invisible," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
JOHN WOLCOTT ADAMS

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1915

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To
GEORGE FOLSOM GRANBERRY

93013

AUTHOR'S PREFATORY NOTE

This story appeared in recent issues of *The Century Magazine*. As there adapted for serial use, it was presented in a somewhat briefer than its original form; herewith it reappears substantially as it was written.

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THE SWORD OF YOUTH

PART FIRST

THE SWORD OF YOUTH

CHAPTER I

ONE bright September afternoon in 1863 a middle-aged woman with a gigantic masculine frame and the face of a soldier sat on the porch of a lonely farm-house in central Kentucky knitting an undersized sock. Between her hands, which bore some resemblance to the feet of a big hawk, the web of soft grayish wool hung down like the tender torn skin of a mouse.

Once she dropped her work, and picking up the companion sock just finished, she stretched this as though from a wish to have it larger, to have it look more like the sock of a real man. Again and again, unaware of her act, she pulled it the long way and the broad way; and again and

again the yielding fiber of the sheep's back returned to an inexorable mold, to the disappointing shape of nature. Then rigid in her chair, she stretched her arm out sidewise and dropped the sock to the porch; whereupon, taking up her bright needles, she went on to round out its fellow.

Her eyes rested on her work but her thoughts seemed to dwell upon scenes far off—upon great scenes with great memories. Interpreting her expression, you would have said that terrible events had wrung her heart but had left her the long bivouac of a proud mind. It was the martial vigil of this bivouac that she kept there, sitting majestical and alone on her porch that still afternoon, a wounded sentinel.

At intervals her eyes were raised. They looked across the yard and the stable-lot toward a weedy carriage-road which ran over empty fields to an horizon wall of blue sky and white clouds. She had drawn her chair into position to command a view of this road. She wished to catch the first glimpse of him in the distance, riding slowly, re-

A middle-aged woman, with a gigantic masculine frame and the face of a soldier, sat on the porch of a lonely farm-house in Central Kentucky knitting an undersized sock.

turning from town with his bundles, an undersized figure. There would be the usual slant of sunshine on his coarse straw hat, the yellow hat of yellow harvests.

Whenever she scanned the road a shadow of disappointment darkened her face. It was not yet time for him to return and she knew this; but unreasonableness is never reasonable: it is a pendulum that will never go with any clock; and because his coming was the only incident to stir the monotony of the interminable afternoon, she began to chide him for being late. In the fallow soil of her mind, where life no longer sowed bountifully as it had sowed of old, there had of late years sprung up a strange weed of impatience with him, and now in nearly everything that he did or did not do he seemed born to tread upon that weed.

A breeze, which did not blow wild and free across the country but gamboled about the house as a domesticated yard wind, brought to her nostrils a familiar odor. The next moment from around the corner of the house, at the end of the

long porch where the kitchen was situated, a middle-aged mulattress stepped slurringly into view and stood with respect. In one hand, at her side, she carried a piece of rope, in the other she held a clay pipe; on the heaped-up tobacco an ember from the mid-afternoon kitchen ashes glowed a faint rose.

She spoke with the soft voice of the Southern negro, betokening in her case happy lifelong slavery, out of which had grown two African virtues, affection and loyalty:

"I 'm going for my wood now, Miss Henrietta."

"Very well, Tabitha."

Her mistress—mistress no longer—did not turn her head but merely lifted her eyes with another search of the road. The tone with which she had replied is not heard in this country now, perhaps nowhere in the world. It was the voice of the Southerner of that period, charged with absolute authority over the slave. That terrible authority had just come to its terrible end in the nation but the tone kept sounding; the slaveless Kentucky woman still commanded her slaves.

When the negress received permission to do the work which she was perfectly free not to do, she turned away and with puffs of blue smoke floating over her shoulder moved along a footpath toward the cabins; she alone remained of all those once crowded into those white frame cottages. Near them was a woodpile without wood; the fuel had long since been used. At the center of the little solitude a tall sunflower flaunted the colors of the sun over the desolation of the cooking-stove.

The negress crossed this space and started to wade through a field of weeds toward a fence some hundreds of yards off. There she would gather half-rotten rails, bind these into a bundle with her rope, balance the bundle on her head, and by and by come wading back with wood to cook supper and breakfast.

This story is not about her. Yet all stories of those times are chained to her bondage and to the tragedy of that bondage for the unbound. She explained the iron-willed, tyrannical woman in the porch, the vast desolation of farms and plantations, the distant battle-line of exhausted, mad-

dened armies facing each other half-way across the nation—youths and fathers and old men ready to die in their tracks and dying there, confident that they perished on plains of glory about her. Vanish from American history she never will, in its pantheon of colossal figures the bronze Victory of a great self-avenging wrong.

The words of former slave and former mistress had disturbed the general stillness as the dropping of a few pebbles causes a quiver on a smooth sea. Within the house only the twitterings and flutterings of swallows at the bottoms of the chimneys behind little green forests of asparagus tops; outdoors, around a small stock pond in the stable-lot, only the cries of arrowy barn-swifts as they dipped under the silvery surface with little sounds like the noises of torn silk. In more distant fields and pastures the myriad murmurs of autumnal insect life swarmed to the ear like faint reverberations of the movements of drooping battalions; out there the insects echoed as with half-strangled bodies and shattered wings the dying of the old nation.

Another muffled sound did by and by make itself audible in the porch. Not far off in the yard an enormous peach-tree stood with some of its fruit ripening; for nature ripens a tree as she ripens a life: in its own season but not all at once. Beneath the tree spread the autumn bluegrass. From out a tuft of leaves nature now pushed one royal peach and it dropped to the grass and lay there in full view, tinted with the colors of a sunrise.

The lonely woman glanced toward it and thought of a father and four big, brawny, gallant sons nearly as tall as he making a playful group under the tree while one, grasping a pole to which was fastened a bag like a bird's nest, brought down the peaches unbruised. It went desolately to her heart that for them this afternoon the old house tree again faithfully ripened its fruit but that they had long since bit the dust far from one another in the dark conflict's fury and were brought together for their repose only in a mausoleum of battle-memories which she guarded.

CHAPTER II

SUDDENLY from the direction of the front of the comfortable old brownish brick house with greenish window-shutters she was startled by the sounds of some one coming. She stopped knitting and sat bolt upright, her face brighter. The next moment a girl appeared, walking deliberately and carrying in each hand a plate covered with a napkin.

She, Lucy Morehead,—even at first sight you would have judged her to be about seventeen —had arrived from the nearest farm-house a mile or more distant. The land between the two homesteads was one stretch of meadows and pastures across which, for neighborliness and the conveniences of farm life, a carriage-and-wagon road made its way, with deviations to circumvent green hills and to cross fords at the deep-banked silvery brooks, where sometimes mint grew and brown-backed white-bellied minnows darted. For walk-

ers a foot-path ran straight from house to house and by this the visitor had arrived. And there she was now, approaching under the shadows of the old forest trees, sometimes in open spaces where the sunlight fell on the brilliant grass.

Mortal curiosity and hope hover about anything carried under a fresh napkin. Therefore you might, by reason of attending to the covered plates, have failed to notice that the bearer of them was a gray-eyed lass, a long-lashed, heavy-haired, sweet-mouthed, very winsome lass; not tall, not slender, but built generously on the essential womanly plan and, it plainly appeared, early developed by impatient nature as being a great chance for the right youth—for the right, lusty, ardent youth.

Her dainty snowy sunbonnet was lined with pink; her dainty sky-blue gingham dress had bishop sleeves and a skirt barely reaching to the grass-tops. Her dainty, snow-white bib-apron was tied at her back with long stiff streamers. She had on white stockings and black kid slippers and white lace mitts. Her heavy chestnut plaits

reached to the snowy apron-bow at her back; and in front, at an upper corner of the bib-apron, at the heart-corner, just above a firm warm half-budded breast, she had pinned a little bunch of fresh lemon verbena and pink honeysuckle.

Altogether, she did not belong to the nation's war but to its peace. She came upon the autumn scene out of the world's perpetual springtime. So that, September though it was, you fantastically, fitly conceived her as having stepped down from some upper chamber in the April of old apple-trees with half-opened buds for the flooring and with bluebirds building and caroling about the windows. There she was with her three blended natures, the flower of her sound, sweet body, the maturer vows and bonds of character to be, and in the shadow of these, waiting in the shadow behind life itself, the folded pinion of something divine.

No sooner had she stepped into view than the mood of the eager woman on the porch underwent a change. Her face settled to a look of limited cordiality. The visitor, in the desperate circum-

She came upon the autumn scene out of the world's perpetual springtime.

stances, might be welcome; she was not wholly approved for herself.

But the hostess rose, laying her knitting in her chair, and advanced to the edge of the porch to greet her guest; the Southern gentlewoman of those days always rose to greet *any* guest. As she moved, the eyes with wonderment measured her extraordinary height and dignity. She had the figure and bearing of a weather-beaten, gaunt general wrapped in his long gray military cloak; for her dress was a faded gray silk and its only decoration was a mourning-band like a military collar. This collar was fastened at her throat with a gold portrait-locket which suggested a big brass army-button. Her complexion was sallow and little freckles on her face and hands all the more gave her the appearance of having just been through a military campaign. Her glossy pale-brown hair, as straight as an Indian's, was parted in the middle and brushed in two large puffs back over her ears. She had wonderful amber-colored eyes, in the irises of which little round points of jet looked like scattered bird-shot—bold,

keen, far-searching, unconquerable eyes worthy of a wilderness hunter.

Truly, she made a great figure there, a great presence, solitary gray sibyl of a Kentucky epic past. As a brook may have its spring in a distant cloud-capped range, her own childhood took its rise at the bases of those historic human peaks that were the pioneer people of the West; her origins lay among the stark mountains of womankind. Mainly out of those mothers sprung the tall Kentuckians of the bluegrass. Sometimes the women of that stock themselves shot up to the stature of men, mates and equals of men in prowess, strength, and bravery, endurance, fighting qualities; matching virile loins with abundant child-bearing. A great daughter of this great race was she, though she stood on her porch that afternoon amid the war-blasted fields of Kentucky nearly a century later. Big men for her, big deeds, big virtues, big faults, great breadths of sympathy, great narrowness of prejudice.

At her rotting porch-edge, with the proud breeding of the land, she waited for her guest.

CHAPTER III

"HOW do you do, Lucy? I am glad to see you, my dear," she said, with the smile of a large gentleness, as Lucy Morehead, having put one of the plates down beside a pillar of the porch, came up the three steps. Neither offered to kiss the other, though this ceremony was esteemed a custom of the country. Instead, they shook hands; the radiant girl smiled back at the faded woman, and looking with sincere gray eyes into those sincere amber-colored ones which vaguely suggested two nuggets of gold half buried in the surface of a brownish rock, she said with the simplest response:

"How do you do, Mrs. Sumner?" Then she offered her plate, adding as simply, "Mrs. Sumner, we were making little spice-cakes and I brought you some."

The courtesy could hardly have been held to be

personal; it was rather an observance of the old hospitality when every country home overflowed from kitchen and pantry, orchard and garden, upon its sated neighbors. For exactly this reason the gentlewoman to whom it was offered found the gift a little hard to receive. It brought remembrance of how, with the first revolution of the great iron wheel of war which is always the great golden wheel of fortune—she had been hurled from high to low, from abundance down to need. All her life she, too, had been used to give, to scatter broadcast among her neighbors; and the reversal of position, this tying of her hands of plenty, made the gift a little bitter as she held out to it the hands of want. Nevertheless, her thanks were graciously expressed, and having so expressed them, she turned and bore the gift into the house.

"Sit here, Lucy," she said, coming out into the porch again more proudly and drawing a chair forward, yet not very near to her own.

"Thank you, Mrs. Sumner; I believe I should like to sit on the edge of the porch," suggested the girl as one who slips away; and she went back and

took her seat on the edge of the porch beside the plate she had left there. The seat was comfortable and it was natural, since even grown children often retain the wild-animal instinct that avoids the artificial elevations of chairs. But there may have been a purely human reason also why the visitor chose that spot as the proper remove from which to pay her visit.

Conversation naturally opened with neighborly inquiries, but scarcely had it begun before Mrs. Sumner's attention began to be drawn to the plate. The visitor kept guard over it as though she had not surrendered its contents, as though she was not permitting it, so to speak, to enter the house.

Perhaps only minds of heroic measure experience the full offensiveness of little things, the ignominy of having to treat with them upon any terms. Mrs. Sumner felt obliged, though reluctantly, to take notice of the plate thus forced upon her attention yet withheld from her confidence. Such behavior in her guest involved a departure from acceptable manners, agreed upon good manners.

"My dear," she said, glancing pointedly at the plate to force an immediate explanation, "you are too generous; one plateful is quite my share."

Lucy Morehead merely lifted the napkin and peeped under it with an air of innocence, though allowing it to be inferred that innocence was not the virtue she aimed at.

"Take off your bonnet Lucy," said Mrs. Sumner, quickly.

"Thank you, I've just a little while to stay, Mrs. Sumner," replied the girl, resisting the advance. "But I believe I *will* take it off," she added, considering perhaps her own whim; and raising her chin, she untied the snowy strings and laid the bonnet on the porch beside the plate. Now free to make herself comfortable, she crossed her slippered feet on the grass, crossed her hands in her lap, tilted her head at a slight upward angle against a pillar of the porch, and fixed her eyes on Mrs. Sumner's face, studying its expression.

That face had grown graver. Plainly a liberty was being taken that amounted to an affront. There is often another obstacle to the peace of

minds of heroic measure: they can carry on war only behind the barrier of their own ideals, among which may be reckoned the walls of their own impregnable politeness. If they could push those walls over and pass out and attack on the rude low field as they are rudely attacked, some considerable part of the personal and domestic history of this world would be reversed. Instead, they can only look down from such defenses, not level them. Mrs. Sumner now felt that if her youthful visitor was being discourteous, she must be treated with all the more courtesy. On her own part, since she could not explore the plate, she must ignore it until the little drama worked itself out according to the caprice of the dramatist.

She led the conversation once more to neighborly inquiries. Lucy Morehead, at ease with enjoyment of the situation she had brought about, began to take a wider survey of her surroundings. She espied the peach out in the grass and for a while looked at it with ever-mounting and amused desire.

"May I have that peach, Mrs. Sumner?" she

asked finally, laughing and coloring at her own avowed beggary.

"My dear, you may have a basketful if you can find ripe ones. The pole is propped there in the fork. I will come out and help you."

"Oh, no, thank you; I want just that one," said the girl, declining again; and she went over and picked up the peach and returned to her seat and put it beside her bonnet.

"You know we have n't any fruit knives now, Lucy."

"Thank you; I want to take it home to look at."

Next the girl's eyes fell upon the sock on the porch at arm's-length from the chair of the knitter. She had seen it the moment she arrived. There could be only one person for whom that sock was knit. When she spoke again, her voice had sunk to the lowest tone in her scale. Always it is the frivolous that soars toward the shrill. The lowest key of the voice is reserved for what lies at the bottom of the mind—for the significant, the serious, the intimate, the very tender. The girl

With one hand he held balanced before him on the pommel of the saddle a large handle-less feed-basket containing his purchases for the pantry.

spoke with her voice gone down to its lowest key:

"Is Joe at home, Mrs. Sumner?"

So composedly she sat there, with her slippers crossed on the grass, her hands crossed in her lap, her head resting against the porch pillar, her accusing eyes resting on the knitter's face—childhood in its awful judgment upon age. You would at once known that, whoever Joe was, in the opinion of the visitor he was not appreciated, was somehow being wronged all along. "Is Joe at home?"

The answer was quietly returned, enveloped in comment:

"He has gone to town. He took in a basket of peaches and he is to bring back some groceries. We shall depend upon the peach-tree awhile for supplies. He ought to be here now."

A second question followed in that same lowest key of the intimate:

"He is seventeen to-day, is n't he?"

An answer was returned with dry reticence:

"Yes, he is seventeen to-day."

"Mrs. Sumner," said Lucy Morehead, sitting

up suddenly, "will you give him this plate, please, when he comes, and tell him that it is a cake I made for him? I remembered this is his birthday."

The words were meant to cut, and words meant to cut in that way always do cut.

"Yes, my dear, he will get it when he comes."

The plate was explained, the visit over, but the visitor lingered. She did not withdraw her eyes from the mother's face, gaging its significance. This was only a little scene in an old warfare—that between two women over a man to whom both are bound most closely but each most differently; an old warfare as to which understands him better, esteems him more, holds him dearer, and will attack the other for him first.

Suddenly the girl's mood changed. She bent over the plate, lifted the napkin again, peeped, and laughed to herself.

"It is n't spice-cake," she said, looking up at the mother with innocence, beautiful because it *was* innocence. "It is n't spice-cake!"

"He will find out what kind it is."

"He won't know. Will you please be sure to tell Joe that it 's *bride's* cake?"

She spoke as though for a birthday of that character the appropriate offering was a cake of that description, and to this she had nothing to add. Slowly she put on her bonnet and slowly she walked up into the porch.

"Good-by, Mrs. Sumner."

Mrs. Sumner rose:

"Good-by."

Lucy Morehead went away across the yard as deliberately as she had come. Mrs. Sumner let her hands drop to her lap and watched the sweet April-fragrant figure until it disappeared around the corner of the lonely house.

Among the few wholly innocent pleasures of the old must be reckoned their discovery of the love-making of the young. It is like seeing the first crocus come up in an abandoned yard, like watching from an afternoon window a distant hill turn green, like pulling apart aged lilacs and surprising within them the few strands of a nest. The traveler turns round, steps backward to the rot-

ting gate of the past, and, leaning on it with a smile, looks finally at springtime and romance.

But we have only to press upon life's pleasures a very little to force out of any one of them the blood-drops of a wound; and these shy, beautiful alliances of the young have likewise to be understood as their heartless preparation to capture the scene; as nature's rise and revolt against the old, which will presently push them out of their chairs and beds, away from tables and chimney-corners, out of the porches, out of the world.

As Lucy Morehead's figure passed from sight and Mrs. Sumner took up her knitting, the gayer half of the visit, its freshness, its charm, its romance, passed quickly from her mind, leaving the serious half to weigh upon her reflections. This was her natural way, however, of looking at all life; for one of the weaknesses of her mind was that it was too strong. She was unable to look at little things in a little way. For her they always ran into ever larger things until she lost sight of them altogether in the really important. She would have followed the harmless brooks of

the farm until they reached the ocean and lashed the tides and took part in shipwrecks. Then, with her mind on the shipwrecks, she would have forgotten the brooks.

It is true that there was special reason why the child's visit was grave enough; for it was a veiled attack upon her motherhood, upon her treatment of her own son. She had, moreover, never borne a daughter; and it had been to her a harsh limitation of her own harshness, that she had not perpetuated lovely feminine traits among men, had not even brought into the world another harsh woman to replace herself.

But Lucy Morehead had more nearly than any one else taken a daughter's place. She had been at the Moreheads' on the night the little new-comer arrived, and had been among the first to enfold her in sympathetic maternal arms. As time went on the little girl had become her favorite child in the neighborhood; and this beautiful relation had lasted until the day when nature brought about one of her cruel changes. Lucy Morehead had grown old enough to discover that

the main person in the Sumner house was not Mrs. Sumner but Mrs. Sumner's son. And the change became crueller when she began to take sides with him against the mother—to withdraw her visits, to cool in her affection, until finally the relation between them had become what the visit of this afternoon had shown it to be, one of alienation and of reproach.

The knitting mother thought bitterly of all this; and she did not stop there, but went on to conjecture whether her son were not really back of the girl's reproachful visit and behavior. Had he been complaining of his own mother? Did they stand together in this condemnation of her? She had no evidence on which she could lay a clear touch that such was the case; but she had her intuition. Intuition! That pompous charlatan whom we station at the front entrance of our intelligence to give us news of those who pass and of those who arrive. That mischievous misinformer whose word we never doubt! She had her intuition.

And so absorbed was she with its evil prompt-

ings that she forgot any longer to watch for the return of her son across the fields. Then at last she did lift her eyes, and saw him not away off in the distance but right there close to the fence.

CHAPTER IV

HE was at the stiles near the yard gate, astride his father's old velvet-footed bay saddle-horse, the only horse left to them. With one hand he held balanced before him on the pommel of the saddle a large handle-less feed-basket containing his purchases for the pantry; the day's newspaper lay folded on top of the groceries.

With both hands he lifted the basket over to the upper block of the stiles and then got off on the lower block. He ungirthed his saddle and threw it with the saddle blanket upon the top plank of the fence: the blanket was a piece of worn-out stair-carpet and the saddle had one stirrup. On the horse's back was a darker spot made by its sweat where the blanket had lain. He leaned over and regretfully examined a little place on the backbone; the saddle was rubbing it raw, the blanket not furnishing a thick enough

War and hardships and responsibilities had matured him faster than time, faster than nature.

pad. The horse knew why he was looking and bent his neck around and looked, too, wondering whether anything was going to be done. Then the boy stepped down off the block and undid the throat-latch; and as the horse lowered his head toward him, he slipped off the bridle with a good-by pat or two on the forehead.

Joseph Sumner swung the heavy basket to his right hip, and holding it there and bending far over to balance the weight, he kicked the latchless yard gate open, and came along the grassy pavement to the porch.

As he thus walked bent over, he looked less like an under-grown youth than a little old man bowed beneath the weight of his years and the burden of his toil. You could see that he was strongly built, well put together; but there could be no denial that his proportions were not impressive, not hero-like. The bodily total of him was a disappointment, a chagrin, a calamity. In a family of giants, father and much older brothers, who now that they had fallen in battle were larger than life, since the glorious dead always grow in remem-

brance beyond reality, in such a family of males, with a gigantic mother, too, he was despicable; he was a human nubbin, he was the family runt. Nature had seemingly fenced him off into a little life-pen as a negligible runt.

His hands looked like a workman's from hard rough usage, and they were browned and freckled, as his face was browned and freckled. He was not to be described as freckled but as speckled: for every freckle of hers she had laid on him ten. Under the coarse straw hat you could see that he had thick reddish-yellowish hair, with thick whitish eyelashes and eyebrows. They looked all the whiter at present because he was covered with pike dust; it had settled over him like a fine meal, from his eyelashes to his coarse dark-cloth jacket and down to his negro shoes, unblacked, and tied with leather strings. He was not ill-looking in the face but good-looking, with four strong signs in the direction of manhood—eyes full of genuine character, large ears, a long strong nose, and a big, shapely, honest, most human mouth. Such a mouth alone has made the career

of many a man in his struggle with natural disadvantages.

Perhaps the foremost character impression you got of him was his looking settled. He came upon the stagnant scene as the active, authoritative head of things. A war-child during these later years of his short life, war and hardships and responsibilities had matured him faster than time, faster than nature. In premature development of his whole self he was a young man; he was twenty. And that workman's face of his might next have been read by you as truly a marvelous document of human fidelity, a meek page out of life's testament of faithfulness.

"Well, Mother," he said, in his pleasant way, setting the basket down on the edge of the porch, "here are all the things."

He said this with a tone of glad respect for her but with a candid admission that he was about done for. He might well have been, for he had worked at one thing or another since daybreak. But something else sounded in that voice, the highest, deepest thing in him—the solemn sweetness of

duty. He became at once to you a person who in those simple words was discharging himself of his day's stewardship with a good conscience. You might likewise have inferred, had you listened delicately, that only by an effort had he fixed his mind on that stewardship of buying groceries; the splendid concern of his life this day had not been in buying groceries.

She merely asked one question, the usual question, as she drew her chair over to the edge of the porch:

"Is there any more news from the war to-day, Joe?"

"Nothing since yesterday."

She laid the newspaper covetously in her lap to read at once, and began to lift the bundles out one by one, those packages of adversity, which, as she piled them on the porch, suggested a small rampart against hunger, an armful for the old-time pantryful.

She investigated each parcel, welcomed each, with the comical, the absurd interest of unoccupied, lonely country people in things that have

just been brought from town. He stood before her, looking on reminiscently.

"I wasted two of the peaches," he said, bringing the matter up promptly as entering into a faithful accounting of his stewardship.

"How?"

She did not lift her head; her voice expressed no surprise, but surely it expressed no pleasure. He explained with some self-satisfaction:

"When I got out on the pike, I had n't ridden far before I came to a train of loaded army-wagons on their way south—half a mile of them. Something had happened to one of the wagons at the head of the train and they had all halted. As I was riding along on the side of the pike, one of the teamsters, a big fellow in his new blue uniform, caught sight of the peaches on top of the basket, and sprang up on the seat, and called out to me: 'Hello, you damned, dried-up little rebel, throw me a peach.' I stopped and picked up the biggest and greenest one I could put my hand on, and stood up in the stirrup, and threw it at him as hard as I could. But he caught it and

laughed at me and stuck his teeth in it and held out his hands and called out from behind the peach, 'Hit me again, Colonel.' I picked up another one and threw that at him with all my might, and hit him on the nose. The blood spurted out on his face. I think I knocked his front teeth out; I hope I did. Anyhow, he dropped the peach out of his mouth. Then I rode on. Two were all I could waste on him."

That quick heat, that instant blow, which was in his father's blood and in hers, that family trait, that Kentucky ideal, drew from her in his case no response. Such things were not for him. An attack on half a mile of army-wagons with a basket of ripe peaches meant for market—that did not particularly resemble anything in the pioneers. Nothing in the life and adventures of Daniel Boone was eclipsed by it, for instance. The pleasure he now felt in telling of it almost savored to her of brag, because he had nothing bigger on his record as an achievement.

She was looking at a few lumps of white sugar.

She knew perfectly well how white sugar looked; but she was looking at the white sugar, which at any sacrifice she would have. Suddenly she laid the package down, glanced over the total of things on the porch, and, missing something, raised her dull-burning, amber eyes to his:

"Where is the tin bucket you were to buy and where is the lard?"

He met her look, thunderstruck, undone. He jerked off his hat and thrust his fingers into his sandy hair on one side of his head and rubbed it hard, as if to cudgel the undutiful brain on the inside. Then he made his clean, sorrowful confession:

"I forgot the bucket and I forgot the lard."

This was one of the failings that tried her, his forgetfulness. It grew on him. When he was young, apparently he could not forget anything; he was a little remembering prodigy. But as he had grown older, he had begun to lapse, as though his thoughts, separated from his duties, had chosen widening paths. To her it was a bad sign, a weak tendency toward slackness, shiftlessness.

Certainly this was no pioneer trait, no family trait. If there had been a family coat-of-arms, its motto would have been, "Do not forget." Aye, do not forget. Do not forget strangers, do not forget friends, do not forget enemies. Do not forget hospitality, do not forget kindnesses, do not forget injuries. Do not forget the living, do not forget the dead. Vigilance, wariness, absolute attention to the thing in hand—these had made the pioneer, had made Kentucky, had made the family. History had no record of sleepy-headed, wool-gathered backwoodsmen, or of absent-minded Indians; or of absent-minded Sumners.

The spirit of this hardihood, of all these traditions, was in her tone as she asked her next question:

"How did you happen to forget?"

"I don't know *how* I happened to forget. I wish I *did* know. I would n't do it again."

"I made a memorandum for you."

"On the way to town I read the memorandum over and threw it away: I thought I had *memorized* the memorandum."

"I think I knocked his front teeth out; I hope I did."

Now, what kind of pioneer was that, again? Of what value to history would have been that great Kentucky expedition of Lewis and Clarke into the Northwest, for example, if they had made memoranda of their journey, memorized the memoranda, thrown the memoranda away, and then forgotten what they had memorized?

With every attempt to get at the root of the matter, he further demonstrated his unreliableness. And now he stood before her convicted of having come short of his duty. His plain judgment of himself was that there could be no way out of this trouble, that he had failed of his duty. Thus he forced her to provide a way, which would also carry along with it the needed wholesome discipline.

"Go into the kitchen and get the old bucket," she said in a voice of mortification that she was brought down to a trifle which might have been remedied so easily, "and go over to Mrs. Morehead's and tell her that I wish she would lend me enough lard for supper and breakfast. Tell her I told you to get lard in town to-day but that you

forgot it. Explain to her that I am ashamed to have to borrow."

Her voice put the load of the whole matter back on his shoulders; and he accepted the load with the submissiveness of a tired donkey which, having reached home hungry and thirsty after a long journey, is started off on another without food or drink. In truth he became instantly alert and grateful for this unexpected way out of the difficulty. And he started off toward the kitchen, saying to her with a kind of apologetic reassurance and with fresh faith in his efficiency this time:

"It won't take me long. It is n't time yet to go about supper. I 'll be back in a few minutes, Mother."

CHAPTER V

INDEED, he walked so fast that only a few minutes were needed, along the straight path across the fields, to bring him to the Moreheads'.

As he entered the yard, Lucy Morehead was out there watering the flowers growing about the front porch and in little oval beds on each side of the pavement: they needed regular watering that year, for there was a great September dryness in the clouds. The younger children of the family, in fresh white frocks, with fresh ringlets and tiny slippers, were playing about her at a safe distance; for to keep them at this distance that she might be undisturbed, she now and then lifted the watering-pot and threw the spray at them, threatening their frocks and curls. It was a charming scene.

She, too, at home was at the head of affairs. Her father, the country doctor of the neighbor-

hood, had died the year before the war; her brother, the eldest child, had at the first bugle-call gone into the Southern cavalry of Kentucky men; her mother was an invalid. And thus she also had been forced into a maturity of character beyond her years. But their property had not suffered from the ravages of war: the former physician's services to all were gratefully remembered, and the family were, besides, sweet-natured people who built friendships in houses as naturally as birds build nests in trees.

When she saw him, she put down the watering-pot at once, heedless of the children, who closed in and wrangled as to which should use it; and she came to meet him with the serenity which was her temperament, her trustfulness. She was now white-frocked also and bare-headed, with a blue ribbon at her throat white like a swan's, and a blue ribbon at her belt, and blue ribbons laced Highland-fashion about her white ankles. She was just old enough to begin to make herself two or three times a day an invitation to love's arms.

The effect of her afternoon visit to his mother had left misgivings, and his unexpected appearance became associated in her mind with a stormy scene that might have followed upon his return.

"How do you do?" she said, with uneasiness at heart, but with mischief still lurking in her laughing eyes.

He stopped before her, soiled and forlorn, and did not even pluck up heart to greet her. Her loveliness, her freshness, was blurred to him, was invisible, on account of his abject errand, his most unbeautiful emergency, his disgrace of memory.

"Lucy," he said with a husky throat, "I forgot the lard! Mother asks Mrs. Morehead to lend her enough for supper and breakfast. Will you get it and bring it out to me, please? She will get some in town to-morrow and return it. And please tell Mrs. Morehead that mother is sorry to give her this trouble. Explain to her that it is all my fault, my forgetfulness."

He was so glad to take the blame off his mother, to lay the load of it where it belonged, on his

donkey back and brain. Truly, he showed the meekness of a self-thrashed human donkey, that had enjoyed his beating.

His first words having quieted her fears, she gave way to humor at the sight of him, at the ignominy of his plight. The dews of laughter were on her long lashes, and her face had flushed rose-pink as she took the bucket out of his hand. But first she let her hand slide down and lie beside his about the bucket-handle. His had not been washed since morning, but the touch of it sent a thrill through her which she did not quite acknowledge to herself. She knew only his hand, not his lips.

"You shall have all the lard you want," she said, with an overflow of the maternal. "What else?"

"Nothing but lard—unless I have forgotten something else."

She eyed him with comical distrust.

"Had n't you better try to remember? Suppose I run over the list? Butter? No butter? Preserves? Spice? No, not any more *spice*.

Never any more spice, never! Nothing else? Soap? Lye?" She had in her a streak of woman's salutary wit and wickedness.

"Lard 's all," he said solemnly, "I *think!*"

She tossed her head at him and turned and walked toward the house.

"Hurry, Lucy, won't you, please?" he called after her, desperately.

"I *am* hurrying," she called back over her shoulder, slackening her steps, with her lovely profile in view.

When she brought the bucket out to him, he held out his hand to take it, but she stepped back, searching him with her eyes reproachfully.

"Not until you remember something else," she said.

"There is not another thing," he protested. "Not one thing, I swear!"

She stepped forward and looked at him rebukingly.

"And you have already forgotten your birthday-cake?"

He shook his head as though he did not under-

stand, as though his brain had given away under the strain.

She explained, with some sudden misgivings of her own:

"I made you a birthday-cake and left it for you this afternoon. And you have n't received it?"

"For *me*? To-day? You made *me* a birthday-cake *to-day?*"

He dwelt upon the last word as though it were the most important part of the whole matter. Then he continued, looking at her with dusty tenderness:

"I had just gotten home, and we were looking over the things when we missed *this*," taking the bucket from her and shaking it ignominiously. "I will get the cake when I go home. And when I come back, I 'll thank you *then*. I want you to meet me after supper. There is something I want to tell you, to-night, Lucy."

His look, his voice, instantly drove away playful thoughts. She searched his face and saw what was new and strange. And she asked with quick sympathy:

Only a few minutes were needed to bring him to the Moreheads'.

"Is it something important?"

"It *is* important; but I must hurry back now. You meet me. Don't fail, Lucy."

It was like a command, his first command to her. She liked it all the more for that reason, and she responded at once out of the better liking:

"Have I ever failed? But tell me now, Joe. What is it? I want to know now."

"No, you meet me," he said with a sternness not directed at her and far above the level of the scene in which he was taking part.

"But I cannot wait," she said impatiently, she who never before had been impatient with him.

CHAPTER VI

AS Joseph Sumner hurried home, the sun was at his back and threw his lengthened shadow on the ground before him. His eyes became strangely riveted on that shadow, on that larger image of himself. It was a reality there, but it was a reality nowhere else, having no parentage of flesh and blood, but only its ancestry of air and light. Yet somehow the big solar photograph, alive and moving rapidly before him over the film of grass, fitted the scale of the pictures which had been before his mind all day. As a shadow at least he measured up heroically to those great pictures.

They had to do with the first decisive event of his life. Beyond that event lay the void of his early childhood; on this side stretched the clear track of his memory, one hard, straight road.

It was the night his father and his brothers had

left home, riding away at dead of night before the first eager gathering of men into the first Southern armies. They had not come home to supper that evening, and when he went to bed, still they had not returned. The first thing he knew after that was being gently shaken by the shoulder. Not fully aroused out of his sleep, he heard a voice saying, "Don't wake him." It was one of his brothers who spoke. Another voice closer to his ear insisted, "Yes, we must wake him; we must all tell him good-by." His shoulder was shaken again, and he was gently pulled over on his back. Then he opened his eyes and sat up bewildered and saw, gathered at his bedside, his father and his brothers, with their hats on, and hunting-belts and hunting-boots, all looking at him very grave. His father had lifted him in his arms and carried him across the room to the bureau where a solitary candle burned, and had turned him around so that the light would fall on his face to get a good look at him, he rubbing his eyes and confused as to what it all meant. Then his father, his splendid, glorious father, had said:

"Little man, I am going away to-night, and your brothers are going with me, and we may be away a long time." He stopped there, then went on: "It might be longer, longer. Now, then, you will be the only man of us left at home; and you will be at the head of everything; and you are going to do your best, are n't you, your very best?"

He had answered, not understanding much about it:

"Yes, Papa."

"You are going to take care of your mother? You are going to be a good son to your mother?"

"Yes, Papa."

"And as fast as you grow up, you are going to take your father's place, and take your brothers' places, and be all of us to her as nearly as you can?"

"Yes, Papa."

"I know it. I know it. Well then, little man, God keep you and God keep her and God keep both of you together, till all of us come back—or till some of us—or none of us—"

As he entered the yard, Lucy Morehead was out there watering the flowers.

"Yes, Papa."

His father had set him down on the floor and turned away, and then his brothers had stooped one after the other and told him good-by:

"You must manage everything, Joe."

"I will."

"You may have the shot-gun. Keep it cleaned."

"I will."

"And don't forget about the dogs. Be sure to feed the dogs."

"I will."

"Take good care of mother, Joe!"

"I will."

Then they went out on the porch. The moon was shining away up in the sky, and it must have been about midnight, and everything was bright as day; the shadows under the trees and bushes were the only darkness. Hitched to the fence, saddled, were five of the best horses. Out there on the porch the parting had taken place between them and his mother. As each propped his rifle against the wall of the house and advanced, she

clutched him to her breast. All were tall, but she seemed to tower above them, as against her heart one by one she consecrated them to battle. Each as he left her arms stepped aside, grasped his rifle, and waited. Then his father and mother, with their arms around each other a long time, and low swift broken words from each to each. When their parting was over, his four brothers made of themselves a group about their father, and all five tramped stolidly out of the porch along the pavement, and were mounted and gone, riding furiously southward, with the horses' feet fainter and fainter across the fields.

His mother stood there on the edge of the porch, the moonlight pouring down upon her—stood there as white as death, her long hair, yellowed by the moonlight, falling down over one shoulder, as still and as white as death. Not till they were gone too far to turn back, not till the last sound from them had died out, did she move. Then she stretched out her arms to them and down her face her tears ran. Again and again her arms were flung out, imploring them to come

back, sending them away, in the tempest of her grief and rage.

He stood apart on the porch, with the moonbeams pouring down on him, too, awed and watching her and waiting. His heart ached to feel about himself the arms that had enwrapped the others and had made them so sacredly one. But in that breaking up of the family he was overlooked, left out. She acted her tragedy before him as though no eye beheld her in her solitude. And so, having no one else to turn to, he began from that hour to turn toward himself, to get prematurely old and strong, to know loneliness and its strength.

Since that night Time, like some vast measuring-worm of devastation, had stretched and crumpled its length again and again along the road of history, spanning off its dumb allotment of the awful years; and never once had the red flames of war wrapping the nation gone out, never had carnage ceased, nor hate, nor tears.

And now on this day when he was seventeen years old, he had been putting two great pictures

side by side: that September night when his father and his brothers had ridden away to swell the first flushed armies of the onset, and this September day when far to the south of him stretched the last of the thin, wasted, ragged ones.

Such were the vast dramas of life and history glowing in his brain as he hurried along the foot-path, carrying his few spoonfuls of borrowed lard, with the sun at his back and his lengthened shadow on the ground.

Hardly could he keep his eyes off that big shadow, that coveted aggrandizement of stature, that incorporeal betterment of sun and dust. If Nature ever, as men of old believed, sends auguries to her children from far beyond the counsels of humanity, this may have been one from her to him.

CHAPTER VII

THE plain early supper had been eaten by mother and son in almost unbroken silence.

His thoughts were on the terrible thing he meant to tell her when they were together again out on the porch, where they usually sat till bedtime. As he went over this, trying to arrange it in his distracted brain as best he could, deep emotions—emotions he had never known, were unlocked in him. Gladly he took refuge in the silence of the meal lest he betray himself. There was something that he could not hide, though he did not know this: that as with his troubled face he sat at his end of the table, his poor coarse spoon, his knife and plate, his tumbler and his bread—not because they were poor and coarse, but because they were unblessed by tenderness, helped to make a revealing portrait of him amid those familiar surroundings. The beholder would at a glance

have comprehended that here were a human soul and a human lot which had long dwelt together but had never met. Choking down what little of his supper he could eat at all, he soon rose with a muttered excuse for his absence, and went out to finish some work for the night.

His mother had not remarked anything unusual in his demeanor because her own thoughts were violently engrossed with what she had just read in her paper. Some intelligence even there drove from her mind the disagreeable incident of the afternoon with Lucy Morehead. She had not forgotten that incident; she did not intend to forget it. It had affected her treatment of him upon his return and her manner toward him ever since; the whole suspected meaning of it lay as a spark near her anger, which at its worst was blind fury.

The news in the paper was that her husband's brother had just bought near town another splendid farm, the war-cheapened bluegrass acres of a war-ruined Southern family; the acquisition was further proof of his rapidly growing wealth, due to his influence at Federal headquarters, where he

had large commissary contracts with the Government. While his wealth thus grew, he was at the same time the clue to her own deepening poverty. He accounted for her supper that evening, such as one of her former negroes would never have seen; he was responsible for the house stripped to the barest comforts; his restraining hand was on the empty stables, the empty barns, the ruined farm.

At the outbreak of the Rebellion her husband had held immense Southern investments, with capital partly borrowed from this brother as a loan secured by a mortgage on the estate. Those investments the declaration of war had instantly rendered worthless. The two brothers, who all their lives had been inseparable friends, now sundered by politics, were turned into implacable enemies. Her husband, though on the verge of bankruptcy, hurried South, and soon afterward took his sons with him into the army; his brother's sons went into the Northern army; and thus the breach widened into one of those, common enough in the Kentucky of that time, which

knew neither charity, nor pity, nor mercy. No one wished to be the beneficiary of these virtues; no one would have accepted their divine fruits.

Her husband and her sons fell in the first battles. Not long after, one cold rainy autumn day, there was a forced sale of everything except what the law provided that she might keep—the law which knows to what limits human nature will go and has to stop it on the way. Next her husband's brother, who, under an old fraternal will never revoked, held a joint administrator's right, took legal steps to acquire the management of the farm. He undertook to do this either by moving upon it himself or by placing it under the control of an overseer. She fought him in this aggression. She undertook the sole leasing and management herself. He opposed and thwarted her. And now years had passed, and neither had yielded. Meanwhile all her servants had deserted except one woman, her personal domestic; they had deserted, and some of the best trained had been taken into his household—her cook, her house girl, her coachman. Thus everything that

could rot rotted, and everything that could produce produced weeds.

Always any great civil war is two wars: the war of armies in the field and the war of those who remain at home. The first often betters human nature by the exercise of the elements of its strength and by its struggle in some great cause, covering the welfare and the fate of a nation. The second invariably debases by the contest for personal advantage and the pursuit of revenge. When a war ends, those who survive battles may be better, those who survive quarrels are worse. Soldiers return home forgiving and tolerant; civilians remain embittered and vindictive.

She ate her crust with her thoughts on her enemy, on one more revolution of the iron wheel of war and the golden wheel of fortune, bearing him higher, carrying her lower.

As she rose from the table an impulse probably derived from these thoughts led her to step out upon the front porch. There at this hour in former years the family, reassembled after the separations of the day, were wont to give loose rein

to their animal spirits, fun-loving dispositions. She remained a moment only, solitary apparition of a vanished society. As she had opened the parlor door, she had torn to pieces immense cobwebs spun across the threshold. From the rose-bush half-fallen about the porch-steps long rank shoots crossed the air and pointed at her, driving her back: wild nature was returning to riot over a civilization which once had conquered it, and she shrank back into the house as though herself assailed by the ancient, ever-young armies of Nature. Returning to her customary seat on the side-porch, she sat there slowly rocking, her hands, emptied of work, grasping the arms of the chair.

Before her the direction was due south, and far southward, with a sudden weary wish to forget her troubles, great and small, old and new, she now sent the tide of her heart's yearning.

The scene which rose before her was the Southern camps, those sinking regiments of spent youths, those shattered battalions of old men, eating their soldier suppers. What had they to eat as they sat about their ragged tents or sprawled on the

grass near their tattered flags in their battle-stained gray jackets, many of which at the outset had been decorated with buttons of solid gold? She could see them smoking, laughing, making fun of hunger and hardship, they who had been heirs to millions and owners of the wealth of half the continent. Her imagination led her among them like a guide, showing picture after picture. Off there a group of shapely young dare-devils mockingly surrounded one who was grilling a dried herring on half a canteen. Yonder, withdrawn from the rest, crouched a huge fellow with a torso of a bull wrapped in his overcoat though the evening was warm, its cape pulled down over his face like a cowl, the desire of things far away maddening him. Vividly she could see some gray-haired man with a drink of water in one hand, a ration in the other, recalling a hushed moment at home and the bowed heads and his blessing on the stately meal. And then the white, patient faces of the sick, the ghastly, brave faces of the wounded! Ministering to these the well, the unwounded; trying to nurse them, trying to tempt their appe-

tites? Men bathing the faces of other men with a freshly cooled cloth, some man slipping an arm under some other man and trying to lift him up and straighten his blanket and comb his hair where it had gotten tangled with the tossing of the head all day.

She could particularly distinguish here and there green boys who lately had arrived in camp, who, as the older members of the family had fallen, could not be kept at home. Perhaps among them, almost overlooked by his bigger, noisier comrades, some quiet one who might be there without having been happy with his mother, and thus with no wish to remember her while he marched or when he lay down to sleep. If she could have reached such a camp, she would have pushed by the others and have made her way straight to him.

CHAPTER VIII

JOSEPH SUMNER came around the house and took his seat on the edge of the porch where Lucy Morehead had sat. Nothing was said for a while. There was intense stillness. From beneath the rotting porch-steps a toad which lived there hopped out and with short jumps went down the grass-grown pavement. Every evening he hopped out and went down the pavement and hopped back. Joseph Sumner's eyes followed curiously the departure of the toad. Finally she, with half-unconscious exercise of an old habit of mind at this hour, asked a question: it was a tribute to the routine of former discipline on the farm.

"Have you finished your work, Joe?"

"I have finished it."

It did not escape her that he answered with unusual composure, that his words were stiffened by an extraordinary significance. While she half

pondered the meaning of this, he opened the conversation on his side:

"Mother, do you know how old I am today?"

The question brought to her attention the disagreeable subject of the afternoon. The repetition of it reënforced her suspicion that there existed some kind of understanding to rebuke her as a mother for her treatment of her own son. Lucy Morehead had asked the question in a tone of sweet-natured reproach; her son's tone carried no feeling whatsoever. He spoke as though he realized that his birthday was a very small matter to her, which naturally might be overlooked. She liked neither the girl's interference nor her son's indifference, but between the two she liked his indifference less. It was galling that he should refer to his birthday apologetically. His doing so was part of a submissiveness, a kind of humility in him that had often of late stung her. Apparently it grew in him, this submissiveness, for as a mere child he had been a little yellow hornet of passions.

She answered as, indeed, she naturally might answer:

"I think I am the one who ought to know."

"Do you remember something I said to you when I was fifteen?"

"No, I do not especially remember anything you said to me when you were fifteen."

His comment was a little wistful:

"I thought it was something you would remember. I hoped you would. I told you that if the war lasted until I was seventeen, I should want to join the army. You don't remember that now?"

"No, I do not remember it now."

"Very well, then, Mother," he said, aroused a degree—"very well. But I am seventeen years old to-day, and I want to ask you whether it is not time that I went?"

"Went where?"

"To join the army."

"What army?"

"The Southern army. Don't you think it's time I went into the Southern army?"

"I do not. Why do you ask me foolish questions, Joe?"

He asked another with some quickness:

"When do you think I ought to go?"

She replied with some quickness:

"I do not think anything about it."

He pressed her still more quickly:

"Then you do not think I ought to go at all?"

Her reply was instantaneous:

"Certainly not."

He sat looking at her like a person who without warning had been struck on the head with a bludgeon, and for a moment does not realize what has happened to him or what to do. Nevertheless, from the first instant he did realize this, that she did not even think of him in connection with the war. For her there was in him no promise of the soldier, no future of the fighting man. That call, which the whole civilized world as a marveling listener had heard time and again, to youths of the South to leave their homes for the battlefields though but to die there as fathers and older brothers had died—that call was not meant for

He was his own man, his own master.

his ear and was never to stir his soul. His place was at home, a solitary little farm-hand, doing what farming he could; working about the house, about the stable, cutting weeds, raising a few vegetables, and carrying some of them to market, feeding the cow frozen fodder of winter mornings, sometimes putting on an apron and churning: his best days, his holidays, being those when he hired himself to a neighbor at harvest-time because negroes were not to be had at any price, thus making a little pocket-money for himself. He sat there stunned, and with the pallor of the sick on his face; in his eyes the strange darkness that is sometimes the pathos of the sick.

The toad, having traveled to its ends of the earth, came hopping back along the pavement, its puffed, foolish eyes searching its little world of air, its short, flabby jumps the measurements of its destiny, its tender tongue its only blade against death.

Joseph Sumner sat up straighter against the pillar of the porch, and, looking with sudden appeal at his mother, asked her a question. His

lips quivered, his voice nearly failed him, and his face was ashen.

"You think, then, that I ought never to go?"

"Certainly not."

"*Why*, Mother? *Why* do you think *that* of *me?*"

The words were torn from him as a cry of anguish.

She did not answer. She had definite reasons and she had vague feelings. He was little, he was young, he had never shot a gun, the only one in the house having soon been taken away by the Federal authorities. He had never in his life killed anything but vegetables and weeds. She had never supposed the time would come when he would wish to point a loaded musket at a live grown man and actually pull the trigger. In the simple primer of his life she had nowhere read of his plotting an attack on the military power of the United States, that he was of a mind to go after Grant.

The roots of the whole matter, however, penetrated more deeply into the soil of human nature,

out of which a mere workman's spade will sometimes turn up things surprising and not pleasant to look at; and about him there were in her own nature two such things, not good to contemplate or to write of, either, but thrown here to the surface as dark growths that happily die soonest upon exposure to the sun.

This was one: that from the time she was left alone with him he had given up his out-door play, his all-day followings after whatever was of interest on the farm, and had begun to hang around her, waiting for anything she might tell him to do. Humanly he turned himself over to her as wax to be molded to her will and needs. But perhaps human nature may not often be intrusted with what never resists it. Perhaps no human being is quite worthy to live long with another who submits. Perhaps whatever serves does so at its peril, and only what rules is safe.

The other difficulty took this dark shape: that the things he did for her were such as her other sons had never done; her negroes had done them. The older boys had been young lords of the land.

And his very contentedness in this servitude, the naturalness with which he fitted into it, affected her opinion of him a little, lowered it just a little. For human nature finds it hard to recognize on the earth a few things which seem to arrive upon it as proofs of diviner things elsewhere. Through its long history it has grown used to the one old mixture of good and evil; and if anything wholly good, entirely noble, comes its way, since it cannot discover the familiar mixture, it will imagine accompanying evil and *make* the mixture. Thus invariably the things in human life most misjudged, least understood, are the highest things; the martyrs of the race have had the fate of its criminals.

He was now in the position of doing gladly for her the things she had been accustomed to order her slaves to do, and insensibly in her thoughts of him he had become entangled with slavish work. Unconsciously the things done and the doer of them do become bound up for us as within one iron ring of an idea. A cobbler, meet him where we may, does he ever fail to suggest old

shoes? The country miller of bygone years, did he not look strangely out of place when on Sunday morning, the meal brushed off, he walked into church? Was n't it just a little odd that a miller should think of wanting to go to heaven? The blacksmith of to-day, can we see him chosen foreman of a grand jury without our smile, as though he would be likely to go at the administration of justice with forge and hammer, branding the guilty with a hot iron and nailing a pair of new shoes to the feet of the innocent?

The yoke of the farm, the yoke of the common toiler of the fields which bends the neck down till it stays bent down, had that descended on the neck of Joseph Sumner? Had he become lost to her for the heroic through complete self-sacrifice to the servile? Nothing in him glorious but duty, and simple duty so little glorious?

She did not answer. The terrible anguish in his cry had gone through her, of course, and it may have been the very anguish of it that most kept her from replying; the whole subject were for his sake best dropped.

Meantime there he sat, waiting for that answer, his lips white, the look of wounded devotion in his eyes, which never forsook her face. And it must have been that as thus he waited and as thus she could not break the silence that more and more plainly seemed meant only to spare him—it must have been that some great vital thing in his life came then and there to the end of its existence.

For the image of ourselves that we see in the heart of another is what our love lives by or dies of, and Joseph Sumner had discovered in the mind of his mother an image of himself which she believed to be the true one but which wrought upon him an effect instantaneous and horrible. He had recovered his senses now, his mind had begun to act with inconceivable swiftness, and while she kept silent with many thoughts, he was silent with one—his hatred of that image. Out of the depths of all that he was rose a murderous passion to attack that image, to spring at it and tear it out of her—that image.

When next he spoke, his voice had incredibly

changed. There was in it no appeal to her. The tenderness had gone out of it; there was a sudden loss of lifelong respect for her, and there was a straight sharp challenge:

"*Why*, Mother? *Why* do you think I ought never to go into the Southern army?"

Again she declined to answer.

"*Why? Why?*" he exclaimed excitedly, pressing straight at the core of her.

His persistence irritated her, his stubbornness in trying to draw out things that would mortify him. To end the folly of it all, she laid hold, not unkindly, upon the first reason her mind encountered, not a full answer, but better than a full answer:

"Have n't you your work here to do?"

He replied instantly, with the same composure as at first:

"I have *had* work here to do."

The tone nettled her and she inquired with ironical forbearance:

"And has the work come to an end?"

"It has. The work has come to an end."

This, instead of further provoking her, quieted her.

Her troubles with each of her other sons—and she had passed through a mother's full experience—had begun as each passed from clear, placid boyhood into turbulent youth. She had learned to sit quiet through such storms, refusing to see them while they lasted or to remember them when they were gone; and she was too wise now to throw away former wisdom. She suddenly wondered whether this was not a first outbreak of his, happening in conjunction with a birthday and a disagreeable birthday incident—her disciplining him for his forgetfulness. Therefore when she next spoke she addressed him as though he had not said anything at all, as though they were just beginning a conversation. Her tone had the familiar quietness with which every evening she laid out her plans for the next day.

"Joe," she said, "when you go to town to-morrow, I want you to get—"

"Stop, Mother!" he cried, springing up from his seat.

He crossed the pavement and stood in the yard in front of her chair, and not once during what followed did he move, being fixed there in body as in resolve.

"Stop!" he repeated as though eager to save her from possible humiliation. "Do not say anything to me about to-morrow. I do not wish to leave undone anything you had ever told me to do; and if you had told me to do anything for to-morrow, it would ring in my ears for the rest of my life because I had not done it. Stop, then; let us try to come to an understanding."

She stopped rocking at least; amazement stopped her. What she might have said she was not to know; he gave her no time.

"Mother," he said, with a clear ring in his voice, "I do not think that perhaps you have ever understood me. But no matter, the time had not come. Now the time has come, and it is necessary. I shall try to make you understand. The day I was fifteen years old I said to you that if the war lasted until I was seventeen, I should want to join the Southern army. I am not surprised

that you do not remember. You made me no reply then, and you may not even have heard me; your thoughts may have been on my father and my brothers. I have read your thoughts about them so long; my thoughts have been with them, too. I have read your thoughts about many other things. You have had more than enough to think of without thinking too much about me. You made me no reply, and I had about half a mind to go then; but many things kept me here. When I was sixteen I came much nearer going; still, some things held me back. Besides, I did not wish to go without your consent, and I did not believe you would give your consent. To-day I am seventeen years old, and I have but one feeling: that it is not my duty to stay at home any longer; it is my duty to go into the army."

With this announcement of the greatest plan of his life he was content to pause a moment; to him it was grave enough to justify some attention. He had expected that it would overwhelm her. On the contrary, she sat looking at him without the slightest change of expression

and merely waited for him to go on. Having discovered the presence in him, long fostered, of an incredible folly, she wished to let him utter his whole mind about it as the quickest way of being cured. He had no intention to keep her waiting.

"I have made my plans," he said briskly, returning to the mere business of it all, "but I have planned first for you. You cannot stay here alone; it would be unsafe, and, besides, some one must take my place. Mother, you must send for my uncle; he must come and take charge of the farm. He had better move here to live."

This time there was no doubt of the shock his words dealt. But she never took her eyes from his face. He continued more persuasively, mildly:

"I know how you feel toward him, and I know how I feel; but it will be better to let him come. I have done what I could, but that has been very little. He will bring his stock and he will bring his negroes. Some of them were our negroes; they know your ways; you trained them. Almost

any one of them will be able to do for you more than I have done. My plan is that you have him come, no matter how you feel about him."

She stood up. She was angry at last. He had gone too far. He counseled her to disregard things too great for him to understand. He presumed to dictate to her about family wounds and wrongs, such wounds and wrongs as are sacred to the old and become doubly sacred when bound up with memories of the dead and never to be righted.

She rose and she was angry and she was afraid of her anger. Her caution was that of a man who declines to be drawn into a quarrel for fear that the quarrel may become a fight and in the fight he may overuse his strength and kill. She faced him and she lifted just one finger.

"Not another word!" she commanded almost inaudibly, laying her command on him as though he were a child and as though she stopped a child's utterance with the blow of her will. Then she turned to enter the house.

"Stop, Mother!" he called out again. His

tone was inconceivable to her; it carried an unbelievable authority. Despite herself she stopped and turned just outside her door.

"I don't want you to go in, Mother, and I don't want you to go away," he said—"not yet. Since we have begun, we had better finish. This had to come, and it has been a long time coming, a long, long time. Now let's be over with it once and for all. I told you I had made my plans. But I must know your plans. Are you willing to let my uncle come?"

She took three long swift steps toward him and stopped. Her dried freckled skin revealed under it the ugly stain of a rush of blood; her small oval amber eyes blazed; they blazed like an enraged jaguar's. She forgot the boy who stood there in the yard baiting her; she remembered nothing but old family quarrels. Folding her hands in front of her, the palm of one lying upward in the palm of the other as though she held a prayer-book, in a voice as stilled as though she faced the altar, she slowly read the psalm of her hate:

"Before anything he sowed on this land could be harvested, I would pray to God to blight the fields and my prayer would be answered. Before his stock should drink the water of the pond, I would take the mattock and dig the bank away and drain the pond dry. Before his negroes—my negroes, whom he has hired—should come back into the cabins, I would set fire to the cabins. Before he should enter this house to live in it, I would burn my husband's bed and the nursery where my sons were cradled; and I would sit outside and with joy watch my home, my shelter, become a pile of ashes."

Joseph Sumner looked at his mother with every faculty tense and quivering. Never but once before had he seen her as he saw her now—on the night his father and his brothers had ridden away. And the never-healed wound she had made in him that night she now tore open and made more horrible. She spoke over his head; again he was overlooked, left out, in her devotion to the family, and in her reckoning with its enemies. All at once she remembered him, and she

looked down at him and answered him casually:

"Before I send for your uncle, every weed that can grow is free to grow and everything that can rot shall rot."

"Then let them rot!" he cried, his own anger bursting out at her that she still put him aside, and that what was everything to him was nothing to her. "Let them rot! Better for them to rot than for me to rot!"

Her eyes descended on him with a vivid flash. They rested on him with a steady blaze, as though she would scorch him with scorn that he could make terms with his father's enemy.

"Mother!" he started in again, "the night my father went away—"

"Don't speak to me about your father!" she said, shaking her finger at him. "If you thought of your father as you should, you would not think of your uncle as you do. And you would remember your father's last words to you."

He raised his arm, shook his finger back at her:

"I *do* remember my father's last words to me!

He told me to stay here and be at the head of everything. Long have I heard those words of my father, and long, Mother, have I heeded them. But I do not hear them any longer. What I now hear him say to me and have long heard him say is: 'Not there at home, but here where I and your brothers fell. Come and fill one of these places, come and fill all of them, if you can. Whatever you can do for your mother, you can do better here. No longer try to take our places on the farm. Every man, every boy, is needed on the battle-field.' That is what I hear my father say to me, and long have heard him, but have not heeded."

There may have been for her a breath of music in this that struck chords of music in herself, that smote the harp of her griefs. Again she answered and again she forgot him; again her mind passed from the little scene there at her feet to the great scene of the nation far away. She spoke to that:

"The war is nearly closed. It cannot last much longer, not much longer, not much. When it is

over, those who survive will go upon the roll of eternal honor: they will be the soldiers of all time. But before it closes there may be some who, knowing that the danger is past and hardship at an end, will steal into the ranks at the last hour to get their names on that immortal list." Now again she remembered him; and she bent over and pointed a finger straight down at him:

"Would you like to be one of those? Are you going to try to claim a soldier's glory without having fought a soldier's battles? Do you wish to go down in history honored for having done *—nothing?*"

He was beside himself with rage. He hurled his words back in her face:

"Is it *my* fault that I am not older, or is it yours that you did not bear me sooner? Did I decide when I was to be begotten or when I was to be born? Is it my fault that the war began when it did instead of beginning when it did not? If it is soon to end, then the sooner I am in it the better. Mother, would you see the South

whipped and me not facing those who beat her? If this war ends without my going into it, what will my life be? How will I look my children in the eyes when they ask me years from now to tell them stories about it and when I say to them that I stayed at home; that I kindled fires, fed the turkeys, cooked slop for the pigs when there were any pigs? Are you willing to send me through my life along that road?" His nature broke in two, and part of it flowed back to her with the old faltering tenderness: "But I want your consent. Send me away as you sent away each of my brothers!"

She began to tremble and to show signs of distress. Two thoughts may have pierced her like two more sorrows. If he went, none would be left, nothing would remain but herself and desolation. And if he never came back, everything would pass into the possession of the enemy of them all. She gathered up her strength and replied to his pleading with all the more of iron resolve:

"You shall never have my consent."

"Then I will go without your consent."

She strode swiftly to the edge of the porch and towered over him with all her authority, with that magnificence of will which of old had ruled so many lives. She stood there over him, the last person in the world on whom she could lay any order, over whom she could exercise the whole might of herself.

"*No!* You hear me, Joseph? *No!* Now stop it!"

He laughed at her. He railed at her with mocking as though he were half-crazy:

"Forbid me! *You* forbid me! Your forbidding me has no more effect than if I did not know you. You stand there as though I never saw you." Again his nature broke in two, and this time part of it flowed articulate toward duty: "I *have* to go. There is no help for it, not in me. If I were in heaven and could get out of heaven, I would go. Because," he said, launching at her the last power of his soul, "*because it is right.*"

Those words brought back to her the same past

that she had just brought back to him. Her husband's last words had been: "We go, dear noble wife and comrade, we leave you, leave everything, because it is right: there is no help in us for it."

Now across the chasm of years these words were caught from the lips of the dead upon the lips of the living. But the dead! She had long cherished a strange jealousy about those dead. They were apart from the present. None must draw too near them. Moreover, her anger now swept away even maternal instincts:

"Never think to be like your father and your brothers. Don't try."

The words stung him as with a poison and rendered him frantic.

"If I had never known my father," he raved, "if I had never had a brother, if I had never had my own mother, I would go. What do you think of me?" he shouted at her, he roared at her. "What do you think I 'm made of? What do you think is in me? That I am to sit here on the porch of evenings like the toad under the steps, satisfied to poke out its tongue at a fly and help-

less against being trod on? A Kentucky runt, the cast-off nubbin of my father's blood and your blood?"

He beat her in the face with his words as though they were his fists. He struck her with them as with stones. She threw up her hands before her eyes and turned back into the house.

"Even if I am," he called out after her, "even if I 'm nothing but that," he said in the cooler voice of one who picks up some little clod and tosses it at the back of another whom he no longer has to fight, "even if I 'm nothing but that, I will make the most of it."

She entered the house brokenly, desolately.

CHAPTER IX

IT was quarter or half an hour later and Joseph Sumner was again on his way to the Moreheads'.

When the mind is stirred to its depths, its trifles are often thrown to the surface; and as his mother had turned desolately away from him and he had wheeled rudely away from her, he had recollected that after all his work was not finished: on this forgetful day he had forgotten something else and at once he had attended to that. Afterward he had gone up to his little room, bared by that bankrupt sale, to wash his hands again. Then he had refilled his tin basin with what cool spring water remained in his cedar bucket and had plunged his face down into this and held it there awhile; it felt fever-hot. And he had wet his hair once more. He wet it regularly three times a day just before meals—that

thick yellowish hair which, when dry and especially when he got up of mornings, rose into the air about his head like the beginnings of an *aurora borealis*. He wet it and standing before the cracked glass of his little cherry-wood bureau tried to brush it becomingly back from his comely honest-looking forehead. All at once he wondered whether Lucy Morehead liked his looks. Within the brief time since the revolt against his lot and his quarrel with his mother he had entered upon new life toward Lucy; at a bound his nature had attained maturer growth in the direction of her. As first evidence of this he began to feel concerned about his personal appearance, a novel kind of trouble; for every pair of life's shoes pinch somewhere. When you change the shoes, you merely change the pinch—and often wish the old pinch were back again!

And now he was on his way to her, not dusty but wonderfully fresh and clean, his coarse shoes blacked, his best calico shirt—he had three and usually kept this one for Sundays, seemingly as though it were the best available decoration both

of himself and of his religious emotions—his best calico shirt showing sentimentally inside his unbuttoned jacket. It was secured in position by three little bluish-white china buttons, which in a way appeared to have measured off the space occupied by his breastbone and to have divided this fairly among them. His jacket had been freshened up, too, with a sprinkling of water and a patient brushing, though well he knew that every time he sprinkled it he adapted its surface the better to collect dust, as though the cleaner it were kept, the dustier it grew.

His eyes no longer had the expression of being sensitively on the watch for duties, for things he might have to do or might not have done; instead they held a steady, happy, careless fire. Under his tan there glowed the deeper burn of boiling blood. Tan and freckles and boiling blood combined caused him to look in the face not unlike a splendidly ripened pomegranate. He had acquired a new walk, his stride no longer being that of the farm-boy who drags a tired body from task to task. It rather resembled the careless, inde-

pendent saunter of a youth who has just turned soldier and already feels himself sharing the soldier's character and entitled to the soldier's ways. To his brain had mounted two new red wines, young liberty and young strength—lusty red wines in any man's veins—and he was drunk with the mixture.

All this meant that he had torn himself desperately loose from everything that had been slavish and hateful to him in his drudgery on the farm. He was his own man, his own master; he was himself at last, his long kept-down actual emancipated self. And now already he was on his way to battle-fields where, under the eyes of the world, men were heroes. Already he saw himself a hero on those fields.

Another great change unforeseen by him had likewise come about. Hitherto the farm had been to him an enemy which he must conquer for a living. It had been something with which he had fought a losing fight. It was a foe, an uncertainty, a disappointment; it had meant tired sleep and tired waking, flaming heat and benumb-

ing cold. But now that he was to have nothing more to do with it, unless in happier years to come he would ride over it as its master, he began to see it as something that he was strongly bound to and that he loved. For the first time in his life he could look out upon the earth as it touches those who are not compelled to wrest from it their bread nor are too much buffeted by its storms.

The little path over the fields with its scenery had hitherto been to him as a straight line between two houses; it had no more called out emotions under his feet than would an iron bar in his hands. But now as he walked slowly along, the meadows on each side, the deep still shining pastures, the old trees, the familiar fields in the waning afternoon light and the waning green of summer—he passed them all for the first time aroused to their reality, as giving plenteously to him their established peace, their rooted strength.

He stooped down in a meadow and pulled a red-clover blossom and twirled it meditatively under his nose and stuck it in the buttonhole of his

jacket, the first spontaneous florescence of his heart. Farther along he broke off two little white field-daisies with golden centers,—stars of the earth's tenderness,—and put them beside the clover. Once ten yards away a vesper-sparrow fluttered to a mullein-stalk and, balancing itself there, sang for *him* and he stopped and listened. He came to a brook which ran between narrow green banks. A piece of thick timber, laid across it, made a bridge. He stepped out on this bridge and stood looking down at the brook. Presently he knelt and, reaching under the bridge, broke off some sprigs of mint thriving there in the cool moisture; and dabbling them in the water, he stood up and ate one. He pulled off the heads of the two other stalks and tossed them in quiet succession on the swift water. One sprig sat upright and was carried away like a green cork; the other fell over on its side and drifted flat. He caught sight of a little whirling spot where the brook flashed white as though it broke into laughter; and he pulled the clover out of his buttonhole and with true aim hit it squarely, remembering

with a smile how that morning he had hit a soldier in the mouth with a peach. Somehow he felt kinder to that big, rude, gluttonous teamster since he was now a soldier himself and would soon be hungry for peaches, for bread, for everything.

He lingered there on the bridge over the brook with a kind of truant joy just to be idle, not to have anything in the world to do, but knowing that in a little while he would be on his way toward great matters. At one time his figure was turned up-stream to the water as it ran eagerly to him, then down-stream as it looked back and sped away. It laughed with him, it was so young, so fresh, so eager, so clear and clean, so happy.

In truth, Joseph Sumner had stepped from beside his old companion Care to the side of a new companion Joy. The path between these two is so very short in our lives! Yet he who is at either end of that path knows nothing of the other end. Care cannot communicate with Joy a few feet from it; Joy cannot reach Care at arm's-length away. Side by side they move forward through life, looking out upon the same world and

seeing different worlds. Care takes upon its back the loneliness of distant mountains, their masses, their eternity; Joy plays with the white cascades tumbling down them and enters the huts that harbor human lives. Care considers the forest; Joy entertains itself with the different trees. Care measures its road; Joy looks sidewise at every pair of brilliant wings on any wayside blossom. Care widens until itself is left alone in the universe; Joy narrows until the universe vanishes and itself survives with the loved one.

Thus the old things of his young life dropped out and into the voids rushed other things: a flower, a bird-song, a bridge, a brook, the evening land; and plucking the flower with him, listening to the song with him, standing on the bridge beside him, laughing at the brook with him, crossing the evening land with him, Lucy Morehead.

He had told her to meet him and he did not doubt that she waited. As he pictured their meeting, he took off his hat and passed his hand over his hair to smooth it down in place, wondering again whether she really did like his looks. His

looks had now become such a responsibility that he trundled the weight of them before him as though they made a farm wheelbarrow-load. He pushed his thumbs inside the waistband of his trousers and tried to draw down his shirt so it would not pucker on his chest. He had long been aware of the existence of this unnecessary and disfiguring pucker, but it had never before occasioned him chagrin; he had never distrusted it as a possible detriment to a lover's felicity. Since he was a soldier about to say good-by to his girl, he wished her to remember him as a good-looking soldier, gallant and trim though not yet in his uniform, and with a clean, sweet, fresh, lovable body as he clasped her. He was not so sure that he *would* clasp her but he was perfectly sure that he meant to try. He had misgivings as to clasping her before he told her but there seemed every likelihood that he would clasp her afterward. Young as he was, he surmised that clasping depended upon what you had just had to say for yourself—with your girl.

The boundary line between the two farms ran

at nearly equal distance from the two farm-houses. A high fence marked its course. The land was well covered with a vast network of these high rail-fences in those days of the mid-century bluegrass farmers.

In this boundary-fence a gate was swung wide enough for the neighborly passage of threshing-machines and mowers and grain-loaded wagons. The path ran through the gate. On each side of the fence was a bluegrass pasture, not woodland pasture, but treeless pasture; and on the Morehead side of the fence, out in the Morehead treeless pasture, there had sprung up one of those clumps of trees which were then a characteristic feature of the country. The traveler saw many in those days. Sometimes one would be situated near a valley stream; sometimes on a hilltop, crowning the landscape like a woodland temple of old classic lands.

These small wild groves on the tamed fields were formed variously in this wise: some autumn day a squirrel, living on the edge of the woods near by, annoyed perhaps by whirling autumn

winds which drove the leaves about had brought a nut out there and buried it. His store had been plenteous and he had never returned. In a few years the nut had become a young tree, walnut-tree, pignut-tree, hickory-nut. Then one day a passing bird alighted there as at a way-station, bringing some berry or leaving the seed of one—wild grape, wild cherry, blackberry. In the course of time there were many autumn days, many passing birds. Some brought seeds not wild, an apple-seed, possibly even a peach-seed, a strawberry, a raspberry—signs of the near-by farm with its garden and orchard. One autumn day a robin conveyed some little claret-colored wine sacks full of pokeroot wine; perhaps other darker little wine sacks of elderberry. The winds also bore seed thither. And so years passed and the grove grew until it became some sort of epitome of primitive nature and of cultivated nature thereabouts. Made by animal and bird and winds—winds, the unseen almoners of desert places. All these had worked together with no knowledge of one another and with no

purpose to achieve a common result; and there at last the grove stood, a pastoral witchery of shade and greenness and coolness, of odors and berries and nuts and fruit. Topping it at the center, some forest tree; entwined about this the wild grape. Lower down a fruit-tree; still lower a bramble; still lower wild flowers—dandelions, violets. Lowest of all, grass. All brought together by instincts and forces acting blindly of one another, a sylvan masterpiece created for no end.

The land was high there. It sloped westwardly toward the Morehead place and eastwardly toward the Sumner place. From the summit as a lookout it was easy to see much of what went on in the yard or in the lots of either homestead.

Toward this grove Joseph Sumner was now on his upward way: it was their meeting-place. She would be waiting. He hoped he looked his best. But he doubted it!

CHAPTER X

ON the eastern side Lucy Morehead sat and waited, watching the long gradual ascent which he must climb. She had spread on the grass her shawl of blue zephyr, which she herself had knitted, and she was sitting on this, white-frocked still, a blue ribbon at her cool throat, a blue ribbon about her warm waist, blue ribbons laced about her ankles, her long chestnut plaits knotted with blue ribbons. In the evening light, under the soft clear sky brushed by the low rays of the sun, on the lap of that verdure, against the background of vines and boughs, she waited—waited like some unharmed Marguerite at sundown on the Elysian Fields.

Across the crystal stillnesses of air there reached her on her side of the fence, though she paid no attention to them, the distant evening noises of farm life. From over the fence on the Sumner side

there came not a sound of fowl or beast or human being to betoken the day's profitable and peaceful close. Over there the hatreds of war reigned amid the desolation they had created. Those hatreds, this desolation, furnished the ground of Lucy Morehead's disapproval of Mrs. Sumner. There was small capacity in her nature for hatred of any one, and her brain of seventeen summers and of no worldly experience was innocent of worldly wisdom. She was filled with things much nearer heaven than worldly wisdom ever gets to be. But she had gifts of her own,—a marvelously clear straight eye for invaluable ordinary things, a quite marvelous simplicity of good sense, fairness of judgment; and out of these she condemned old quarrels that burdened a young life. It had become the demand, the requirement, of her whole nature that Joseph Sumner's mother should become reconciled to her brother-in-law for the sake of her own son.

She sat wondering whether the grave things he was going to tell her concerned the family feud.

At least she foresaw that they concerned *her*—her and him, the present, the future; this was implied in his confidential and stern manner.

When through the fence she saw him coming, she rose and started toward him with her quiet steps, with the sereneness of her trust.

He did not as always open the big field-gate barely wide enough for the passage of his body and then quietly close it behind him; but he flung it wide open as for a loaded wagon, and he walked through the middle space as though he were that harvest-freighted vehicle. And he allowed the heavy gate carelessly to slam behind him with the whole shock of its weight. Then he tossed his old harvest-frayed hat edgewise up into the air, and as it descended he caught it on his arm, and advanced toward her, careless, easy, free, with a broad smile. Nature interposed no structural obstacle in his case to a broad smile; all that was required was some outside happening which would warrant him in making use of her ample arrangement.

His unusual behavior and demeanor had not es-

caped her attention, nor had the daisies in his buttonhole. It was the first time she had ever seen flowers on his jacket. She knew the jacket perfectly well, every seam of it and crease and chronic dust-spot; but the flowers struck her as the first revolt of its humdrum existence. Its daisies seemed to consort with her rose. His flowers and her flowers, as soon as they discovered each other began to exchange little responsive signals; began to say for the wearers of them what the wearers themselves had not yet said. The effect upon her was that she did not walk farther toward him but stopped and waited. He came up without a word as though his mere expression ought to suffice, as though the mere look of him would explain. And indeed, upon close inspection, the look was so beyond her experience of him that involuntarily she exclaimed:

"Why, Joe, what have you been doing to yourself? You look *almost*—handsome!"

At this unexpected reassurance, which dropped from heaven as an answer to hard wayside praying, he was of a mind to pass beyond the doubt-

ful frontier of looks and enter what seemed to him to be his own conquered country.

"Then kiss me!" he cried, and he tried to throw his arms about her. Almost he succeeded, for she was not expecting the unexpected, not believing the incredible. She eluded him and softly fled from him and he pursued her over the grass. Once she called back to him with her tranquil laughter:

"You must have found out the name of the cake. I am afraid you have eaten it. I am so afraid you have eaten too much."

He reached for her quickly and caught hold of one of her long plaits. She bent over far away from him:

"Don't, Joe," she said, "or I won't like it," and she gave him to understand that he had already taken possession of all the territory he had as yet acquired. He released her and she turned toward him, tossing the long plaits back into their places with soft sliding movements of her fingertips over her ears. Then she began to study his flowering buttonhole and his best shirt and

his face again with amused bewilderment at his riot of happiness.

"It 's all settled, Lucy!" he exclaimed, eager to communicate his fate. "I am going!"

"*Where* are you going?" she inquired indifferently, feeling sure that he could not be going anywhere very far off.

"To join the army. I am going at daybreak in the morning. I have come to tell you good-by."

The announcement broke upon her without warning. And life's deep warm current seemed to stop. She stood white-frozen and mute. And instantly her heart cried out against destiny:

"No! no! no!"

He laughed at her distress:

"Yes! yes! yes!"

Her swift thought instinctively raised the first great obstacle:

"Have you told your mother?"

"I have told my mother."

He answered in a manner to close that part of the subject; it could not be discussed. But she questioned him all the more with alarmed and re-

buking eyes. She must speak out as one woman for any other woman thus deserted:

"How *can* you go? How can you leave—"

He laughed triumphantly:

"I can go easily enough. I can leave everything."

Her eyes doubly rebuked him next that he could leave two women.

"And you can be happy to go?"

"I am happy to go. It is easy to be happy if you get the chance!"

Other thoughts swarmed in her:

"When did you first think of going?"

He answered with amused quiet determination:

"The night my father and my brothers went. I have thought of it every day since, every night since then."

She resented his having kept his secret:

"And you have never told me, Joe."

"I have never told you," he replied, proud that he had kept his secret. This wounded her and he saw the wound.

"Why should I have told you I *wanted* to go? As soon as I knew I was going I told you." Then he added, as though his mind and life were rusty with experience: "A soldier does not talk—even to women."

Her hurrying thoughts traveled toward her brother.

"O Joe, you will see Tom, you will be with Tom!"

He shook his head.

"I don't think so; it would take me too long to reach that part of the army."

He pointed up the hillside to where her shawl was spread and started toward it:

"I'll tell you all about it."

She sat down, glad to do so, because she had no strength to stand; he threw himself on the grass beside her. Another practical thought had made its way to her practical mind:

"How can you go anywhere without money?"

He studied her face with amused superiority. He had a chance to reveal another secret!

"You see this hat?" he asked, shaking his old

harvest hat at arm's-length. "You remember I worked in the harvest summer before last? And last summer? And that I have been working this summer? Those were my holidays, *my* days. All that money was mine, my negro money. That will take me, more than take me, take me farther than I need to go. Of course I won't need any clothes when I 'm once through the lines. I 'll have my uniform."

The picture glowed before her at once: she was proudly seeing him in his uniform.

"My plan is," he said, pressing on—"my plan is to go straight to Virginia, to General Lee's army. That is the quickest way to get through the lines and that is where I want to be. The Government railroad runs almost to Richmond. Lincoln is determined to capture Richmond. Grant is the man he has picked to take Richmond. I 'm going straight there because I 'll be in the thick of it; from this time on all the hard fighting is going to be there. I won't be with Tom."

So he *was* going after Grant, after all!

She had ceased to ask questions; she merely lis-

tened to the marvel of him as his plans were unfolded more and more. He went into an analysis of the whole military situation. He knew where the different armies were, what armies were opposing what armies, what generals were manœuvering against what generals. His brain was one military map of all the campaigns as far as these were known to the newspapers. The little prodigy of memory he once had been he was still. While she listened, a great change came over her: the almost maternal sympathy she had always felt for him disappeared; for the first time she confronted the hero, and she bowed down to him.

"And now, Lucy," he said as though coming to things nearer home, "one thing you are to do for me. I leave my mother in your care. She will need you."

She looked quickly away.

"Promise," he urged.

She still looked away.

"No;" he insisted, understanding her reluctance, "you must promise; you are to take care of

my mother. And I have told her that she must let my uncle come."

She suddenly looked him in the eyes with warning.

"She will never let him come. She will be left alone."

"Then she will have you. Promise, forget, forgive."

She remained silent. Then the first tears dimmed her eyes. She yielded to him to her own hurt.

"I will do what I can."

"If you can ever send me a letter," he said, continuing to work out his plans, "you are to tell me the truth about everything at home. I shall want to know what happens to-morrow and the next day. And if you must send me such a letter, if you ever have to write to me, go to my uncle. He has influence at headquarters and will get the letter through the lines. If you ever write, tell me the truth about my mother."

The minutes had slipped by unwatched. The sun had gone down, the shadows of the earth grew

darker about them. Remembrance of how late it was startled her at last, and she looked at him with a long quivering breath of pain.

"I must go," she said, "but I can't tell you good-by."

He lay on the grass beside her, propped on his elbow, his cheek in his palm; he looked up at her with no pain in his eyes. Not even parting could extinguish his joy; happiness ran through him like light.

He patted the grass beside him.

"Put your head down here beside mine," he said softly. "This is going to be my pillow. Every night as I lay my head on it, I will remember that yours was once beside mine, on the same pillow—on *my* pillow. It will be there every night. Lie down here beside me, Lucy."

When there is but little time in which to yield, one yields so easily, so much; she lay down beside him, trembling, and with a faintness in her brain.

He sat up and bent over her. He slipped one hand under her head and let it rest in his palm

and he put his other arm around her and bent his face low over her face.

"Remember," he said, "that where your head is will be my pillow. Every night as I put my head there, I 'll remember that yours was beside mine once, on the same pillow—on *my* pillow. It will be there every night. I must kiss you. You must kiss me. We must kiss each other."

Her lips parted; a quiver passed over them—a little quiver of the lips, their delirium, their bliss, life's consecration, life's torture.

He whispered over her closed eyes:

"Till I come. Or—or—for whatever happens to me, Lucy."

CHAPTER XI

JOSEPH SUMNER was on his way home. He walked along slowly, wishing he were not obliged to go at all. Never again to that house where he had been born and had tried to do his duty and where there were poor thoughts of him. He would have started for the war that moment if he had remembered to bring away his small secret hoard of money. For this he must return but he would not go to bed. During the night he would leave the house, sleep somewhere outdoors, and at daybreak be off to town for the earliest train that would hurry him toward the battle lines. He was enamored of that idea of throwing himself down anywhere on the ground to snatch a few hours' sleep and of starting off without any breakfast: very soon he would grow used, grow hardened, to all that.

Rebellious farm boy emancipated from the

slavery of the farm, young soldier, accepted lover, he started slowly homeward through the twilight along the little field-path of memories.

The sun by now was well below the horizon, leaving a few clouds gathered outside the closed gates of the day like disappointed sheep, forbidden to follow any farther the shepherd of their ancient road. Elsewhere the evening sky spread clear and tranquil, and under it the whole landscape lay in a startlingly vivid light.

Nothing now had a shadow. Nothing had a brighter and a darker side. Trees and fences to the right and to the left of him, each nearer bush and weed, the plump gay clovertops, the decrepit stumps, the tangled mangled blades of grass falling across the path—all were revealed in the same light; all were touched with the justice, the impartiality, of a balanced light. And nothing stirred in the air, there was no air. There was no west nor east, no south or north, for the winds; no points of the compass for the absent winds. There was only the earth's atmosphere as one deep mirror of vision and in that mirror

Nature, reflected as living but powerless to move. It was as though Time, the disturber, had quit the scene, leaving only Time, the master of stillness.

As he went forward more reluctantly, he began to take a last look at things familiar to him all his life. Seen thus in the evening stillness, they could but fix themselves in his mind as permanent, could but remind him that they would remain much as he left them though he were years in coming back, would remain thus though he never came. He grew acquainted for the first time with one of life's deepest experiences: the pathos of going toward great changes, leaving the things he loved unchanged: we realize that we count for so little on the general scene.

In truth quite suddenly the farm, *his* farm some day if he lived, quite suddenly the very ground under his feet began to speak to him, to reason with him as though he needed to be reasoned with and had no one else. It began to say that the winds pass; that the worst storm is soon over and counts for little in the long run;

that the thunder does not crash for a year at a time nor a flash of lightning burn for a continuous week. The nation's war was but a tempest in its history, not the great quiet peace-loving nation itself. It went on to say that whatever wanders is worthless; only what stands still grows to full size; only what is rooted in its place ever ripens. The wheat accepts its lot, whatever that lot may be, and through such acceptance whether of frost or fire comes to its patient gold. The inanimate inarticulate things he had toiled with, the poor mute things he despised and was glad to be rid of, offered him their experience, their lessons, their wisdom. The clods became his philosopher.

He went forward so slowly now that two or three times he was about to turn out of the path and sit down in the fields, through lack of resolution to sustain him longer. Sometimes on those fields at winter twilights in those years a huge bonfire could often be noticed from a distance. It was the burning of the gray heaps of hemp shards to which clung filaments of inflam-

mable tow. For a few minutes there would be a red roaring flame; and then the bare ground again still holding its winter cold, and on it a thin covering of fresh ashes like scant flakes of snow. Through the ashes you could see the earth's old wounds made at seed time: the furrow of the March plow, the tooth of the April harrow, the hoof prints of the horse which had carried the sower back and forth. Brief flames, thin ashes, old uneradicated scars.

The counterpart of that scene of the Kentucky hemp fields was taking place in the Kentucky boy. His fire had died out, his boiling blood had cooled, in his brain there was no longer the mixture of the new red wines of young liberty and young strength. His fire was out, its ashes were left, and under the ashes were the deep ruts of the years and the old wounds of slavish things. Insensibly even his walk had changed back into the listless gait of the farmhand, going home to his bed after his barren day with the mold.

For not in an afternoon, not in a quarrel, can

we empty our lives of the things that have long filled them and ruled them. Cast these out as we may, they will rush back; time and again they will rush back. The ox which has been broken to the yoke will, after the yoke is lifted from its neck, continue to swing its head low as when the yoke is worn. Turned out to graze, it will cross a wide meadow and place itself flank to flank beside its fellow ox as though they drew their load. And many a time our past lives when about to be discarded, whether our selfish lives for the sake of ourselves or our generous lives for the sake of others—many a time these pasts of ours, if they can but give themselves the names of duties, will fight to regain their control of us. We may know them for what they are and resolve to end them for our good; but wrapping their dark bodies in white robes they will often succeed in reconquering us as abandoned virtues; they reënter us as our indwelling angels whom we had deeply wronged.

The whole of Joseph Sumner's boyhood on the farm with its habits and responsibilities met him

there in the twilight path as he was on his way to the house with the idea of going away. The whole group met him and sought to dissuade him. All reproached him with one word—duty; all called him one thing—a deserter of his sacred post, his only post in life. By everything that was good in him they swore he must not go.

His head dropped heavily forward, and after keeping on a little further, he turned out of the path as one who no longer has a path and sat down in the fields amid the shadows of the earth.

And now with his first yielding, everything that had reproached him instantly crowded about him and reproached him more clamorously: at once he paid the forfeit of beginning to yield; for upon the discovery of his weak point everything freshly attacked him there.

The farm again sternly reproached him without words: he was abandoning his land. Not far away now must lie for the nation its long unbreakable peace: he would be more needed during those years—more needed for the long peace than for a brief war. By rushing into the latter

he might by his death efface among the living the line of his fathers. That reproach was laid on him as an intolerable weight—those years of peace and the farm in the possession of strangers.

His mother reproached him with more than words. From where he sat he could see through the trees in the yard the corner of the house where her bedroom was. At this hour, often returning from the fields, he would watch for her lighted candle. To-night there was none. For the first time in his life his mother had not lighted her candle: she sat there in her darkness because he had deserted her.

And Lucy Morehead! Her first instinctive question had been: "How *can* you go?" That fundamental judgment of hers condemned him. In the hurry of their parting her mind had been engrossed by other things; but he said that in time she would come back to that low mean thought of him and remember him only as having run away from his duty at home. And that conviction of his not being true to the core would wear out her love: she would never marry him.

And his father and his brothers! He had told his mother that his father's spirit called to him to quit the farm and come to battle; still he was not positive. Now it seemed to him that his father and his brothers lifted themselves out of their soldier graves and looked at him sorrowfully for being false to his last promise, that he would stand by his mother. They awoke out of their martial sleep to rebuke him, then lay down again in their martial sleep.

But what if he went to bed as usual and in the morning as usual started about his work? What would his mother think of him then? That he had backed down after a little brag and a little bluster: a timorous little whitefeather—the nubbin. How could he live with her any longer even if he did *not* go? He saw one ruin there. And suppose the next day he went to see Lucy Morehead and as she, amazed, came to meet him, he were to greet her with the words: "I have given it up, Lucy. I am not going." He durst not picture how her love would begin to die, even as she shrank from him. He beheld another

ruin there. And after all he was not so sure either that as long as he lived, whenever he thought of his father and his brothers, he would not see them looking at him with reproach that he had shirked fight and kept far from the great fields.

Thus outspread before him was the whole tumultuous disordered field of duty. But what was duty? It was right to go, it was wrong to go. It was right to stay, it was wrong to stay. He could not be true without being false, faithful without being faithless, loyal unless he deserted—something, somebody.

And thus in a way the boy, alone there on his father's farm in the darkness of that September evening long years ago—in his way he was all of us. The nation writhed in the deathtroes of a great sad war; but within him was a greater war still. It is the war we all wage between what is right within us and what is right; between one duty and another duty; between what is good and what is good. Not war between our strength and our weakness but between

our strength and our strength, between our peace and our peace. When we triumphantly fight the evil within us with the good within us, we have our victory for our reward; but whenever we destroy one glorious virtue with another glorious virtue, our triumph can only be our loss. For we have driven from the battlefield of the mind a vital force which yesterday we may have relied upon to win life with; and to-morrow we may fail to win life again because we have defeated that force to-day. In the victorious war of good over evil we reap at least the approval of conscience; but in the warfare of our good upon our good we can only achieve the partial destruction of ourselves: we have become the conquerors of our best.

This was the boy's war out there on the fields amid the dark shadows of the ground and amid the white shadows of his spirit.

It was almost dark now. Night seemed to have settled finally down. Then he became aware that objects before him began to grow more distinct. The shapes of the trees returned, the

stumps reappeared, the path nearby once more took its way visibly down the slope; all because light had begun to stream from behind him across the landscape. This was the radiance of the sun long since set, the afterglow of summer evenings when far-bent rays suddenly shoot up from beneath the horizon and begin to brush the clouds. The sun goes down, the west grows dark; then all at once light begins to return—the afterglow.

He turned round and sat absently watching that light from the hidden sun. It rose higher, spread more broadly. It reached the clouds and began to pass from one to another until it brought out the shapes of the whole group of them—still balancing themselves there above the path of the sunken orb.

In old eastern lands the earliest poet of nature whose words have come down to us in the poem of *Job*, as he looked out upon the universe and made his reverent study of it, observed those same balanced clouds. It seems to have filled him with wonderment that they could so arrange themselves about the sun—those great

shapes crossing the sky: vast bulks that never fell, never toppled over however top-heavy, never upset howsoever they might lean: pinnacles built on nothing, towers without foundations, mountains with no rocks to rest on. And so it all became to him one of the uncomprehended secrets of the power of God: "Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds?"

In the mind of the boy there was also a sun, one moral sun forever crossing its sky—his conscience. And as the sun in nature creates the clouds of the earth, so the moral sun within him created the clouds of his life, his duties. Without the sun in nature no mists; without conscience in him no obligations. But while he could see the sun—both the sun and its clouds—never could he see his conscience: he could see only its attendant shapes, his duties.

And now he sat there and watched, far away in the west, the clouds poised around the invisible sun; and tried to consider his duties, poised around his hidden conscience.

Meantime nature, unmindful of him, went on

with her everyday work. She proceeded further to paint the scene. Slowly with her vast brush she brought back the faint blue of the sky. On this field of faint blue she began to sketch long bars of red—barred clouds of faint low red. Then here and there over the field of blue, amidst the bars of red, she scattered a few white stars. Blue field, red bars, white stars.

The boy looked on with his soul in his troubled eyes. It was no miracle wrought out for him, no portent, no uncommon sight. Many a time he had seen the equivalent before; but now for the first time he thought of it differently. It suggested to him the colors of his battle flag—the battle flag of the soldier of the South: blue field, red bars, white stars. And so those ordinary colors of the sky became to him a reminder of battlefields far away where a great cause was dying out in the world not for lack of manhood but for lack of men, for lack of boys. It seemed to him that he could almost see a battle-spent youth whom he did not know, turning a mute look toward him as if he would murmur:

"Come and strike hands and fight on! Take my sword!"

As quickly as the scene on the sky had been brushed in, it was brushed out: the red bars faded, the blue field was no more, the stars that were left were not the sinking stars of a flag but the constant ones of eternity.

And now he sat alone with darkness all round him far and near, looking at only one light: that strange marvelous light of his conscience within him—that unseen sun—around which were grouped his balanced duties.

THE
SWORD OF YOUTH

PART SECOND

CHAPTER I

IT was a fresh cool morning in the wild rough shaggy country of northern Virginia toward the last of March 1865 nearly two years later; and at a strategically chosen spot along the edge of a thick wood was encamped a detachment of the Army of Northern Virginia, the harassed unconquered Army of Northern Virginia. That land once gave its name to that army but for all time the army has given its name to the land. Its last lost battles live in the red flash of the storm, in the crash and boom of thunder, in the slow sobbing valley rains and on the white escutcheon of the snows.

About ten o'clock, strolling along an edge of the camp, passed two young soldiers, Joseph Sumner and his tent-mate, battle-mate, death-mate; his close human brother at night with one oil-cloth to sleep on or no oil-cloth; with two blankets

to cover with or one blanket or no blanket. This comrade was a heavy stalwart young South Carolina-Virginian, a few years older than himself, whom as they affectionately sauntered the Kentucky youth called "Fairfax."

Nearly two years of military service, of marching, camping, entrenching, foraging, defending, attacking, retreating, starving, thirsting, freezing, but always fighting, had set their mark on the Kentucky farm-boy. He had broadened and he had grown. He had shot up late toward his full stature and was growing still; undersized no longer but now in his nineteenth year compact and erect, shapely, seasoned and soldierly-looking. He had won his share in the heroism of the campaigns of the Wilderness, written lastingly down into the world's history of good fighting—the fighting of the pure old American stock in a pure old American quarrel and war. He was already a veteran battle unit of the South in one of its beaten armies of unconquered men. All his earlier work on the farm had been preparation for his development into the tried and hardy

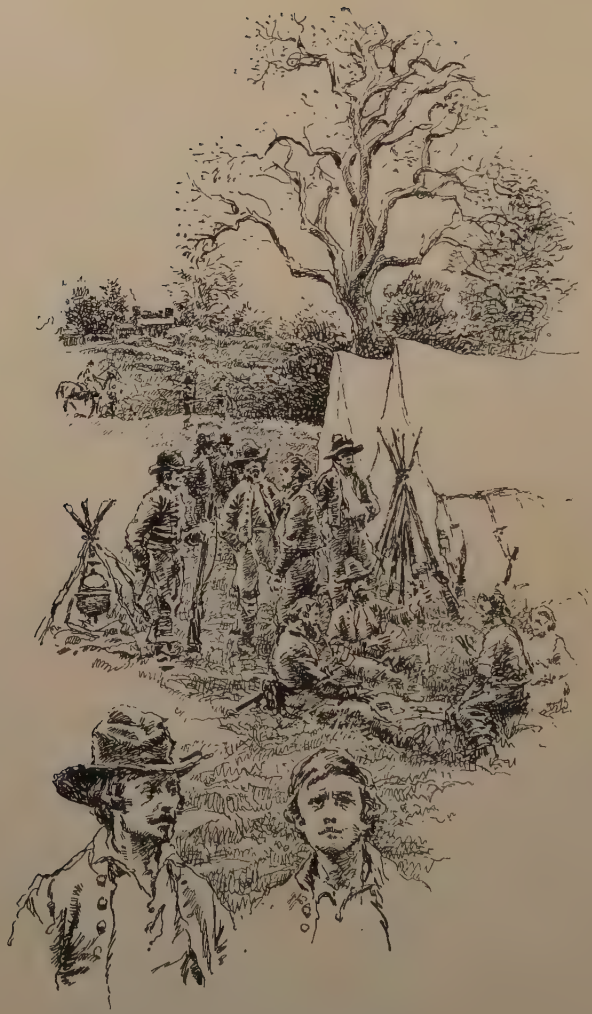
soldier. Hardships there had showered upon him here their reward. For when hardships come to a youth who knows how to mint their rough ore into gold, the yield for him is treasure indeed. Further behind in his life lay his great American inheritance of old dogged indomitable Anglo-Saxon pioneer traits.

The two comrades strolled gaily, carelessly, as though not aware that a few miles distant a hostile army was hunting them and their comrades down, closing in upon them, crushing them with equipments, supplies, numbers. Almost in reach of the ear was the music of Northern military bands of ruddy-faced musicians with new instruments; almost within hearing was the pathos of melodies of love and home, played to conquering troops near the end of the war and welcoming them back to soft delights.

At nearly every step the two friends were hailed or halted by other soldiers as light-hearted as themselves—the ragged and doomed gay. For what these veterans lived on was not the vicissitudes of war but their proved traits as men. They knew

that they had within themselves what could not be captured or conquered: their bravery, their endurance, their loyalty, their soldierly honor. Out of these elements of nature they drew their laughter and their light hearts. Their cause might be overwhelmed but their characters could not be crushed.

This morning there was a ripple of excitement: it had become known that they were on the eve of a great battle, perhaps the last of their battles. Whatever the issue between an overpowering and an overpowered army, it meant for each of them one more victory of personal endurance and survival or a soldier's grave and glory. A group had formed not far from headquarters and the talk was of this struggle near at hand. The two friends joined the group. By and by some one drew the attention of the rest to the other great event of camp life next to battles: the mail had arrived. As it happened now, a special mail was reaching headquarters; a courier had just been seen to dismount. A little later an orderly, well known to those gay, loitering comrades,



He was already a veteran battle unit.

came out and approached the group, bringing in his hand several letters.

"A letter for Joseph Sumner." He delivered it and passed on.

The letter had the thickness of a little book. It was heavily sealed and it was significantly stamped as from Federal headquarters. As Joseph Sumner received the letter and saw the handwriting, his comrades observed a death-like pallor spread over his face.

"I will leave you here, Fairfax," he muttered, and turned away. He went, straggling weakly, toward the extreme edge of the camp. The wood was thickest out there and he sat down behind a big tree on the side screened from observation.

Letters from home! The rain of those letters upon fathers and sons and husbands and brothers and lovers was more dreaded than the rain of bullets. They sometimes tore wounds worse than those of steel and shell. Soldiers saw their comrades, after reading letters from home, begin to wander around half-crazed. They often noticed

them go off by themselves in some quiet spot, if there was one, into their tents, if there were none, and lie down flat on their faces and hold their heads as though these were bursting with problems worse than pain. Often during those last years there came upon the exhausted soldier of the South a strange sudden day-blindness, so that he would have to be led around by a comrade. A letter, arriving for him during his affliction, would have to be read to him: the comrade who undertook to read such a letter sometimes broke down, could not get on with it at all. A day or two before this Joseph Sumner, while talking with two young creoles of a New Orleans company, had seen a letter delivered to one of the brothers, who had glanced at it and with a cry, "*Tout perdu!*" had dropped senseless.

Some of his own messmates had been detailed to shoot men, model soldiers, after they had received letters from their homes. They had overtaken these frantic men and dragged them back into camp; had marched them out and shot them at sunrise. Often officers, forced by discipline to

order these military executions, would gladly have thrown arms of humanity around those whom they condemned to death. *That* was the soldier's terror as the war drew out longer and longer and the rain of the letters became thicker and thicker: *that* was his terror—the shallow ditch in which one of those shot men was buried quickly with the averted faces of his brothers in arms. That black hole was not in any cemetery; not within any military inclosure, on no plain of honor, in no country, not in any potter's field: it was on the rejected waste of nature where the human rat had been stamped out of existence and thrust into oblivion—the scampering rat of the army, the deserter.

The will of the Southern soldier was set against such a fate for himself as the war drew to a close; more and more it became his supreme ideal to stand fast, to be on the field at the death of his cause or to be in his grave with his comrades' devotion.

Joseph Sumner sat at the root of the tree, on its hidden side, with his letter in his hand. It

was the first news to reach him since he left home. Of what had taken place there meantime he possessed no knowledge. He himself had never written through lack of opportunity; and therefore his heart had never sent back its messages, and was this moment filled with the things he had long wished to pour out to each of two loved women. He could not shake off the feeling that these first urgent tidings were grave tidings; he noticed Lucy Morehead's handwriting and he noticed the seal of Federal headquarters, a sign of the powerful prompt influence of his uncle.

He dared not open his letter. With each moment of postponement his dread became more horrible. He began to say to himself that in some way this letter was going to be the end of him; it was going to shatter him, break him in pieces; it would end one or end both of the most cherished dreams of his life. Those dreams were that at the close of the war he would some day quietly open the yard gate and walk up the pavement to his mother, sitting on the porch; he would stand before her so grown and changed as to be hardly

recognized. His reproach of littleness having been taken away by nature in her own time. Then he would hear her cry and feel her arms about him and have his face covered with her kisses of memory and her proud tears. He, tearing himself loose would hurry across the fields to Lucy Morehead and find her wherever she was and infold her at last as his—his for long bright years on the farm, the years of peace, with her children about her.

He said that this letter was going to destroy those hopes. If it was to be so, then he wanted a few minutes more of happiness. He asked for a respite in which at least to say good-by to joys long looked forward to.

He laid the letter down beside him and leaned back against the trunk of the tree and closed his eyes. He gave himself up to the forest, to the perfect day, to beautiful things, to his dreams.

The season was forward and spring was on the long northward march. Miles southward on this side of the camp peach-orchards had burst into bloom around farm-houses—far-seen masses of

rose color like garlands strewn on the bare ground for the feet of the bridal spirit. In the depths of nearer forests dogwood trees hung out by the way their samite stars; oak trees swung as in unison their military tassels. Water-courses ran swift and clear, verdure had sprouted along their banks, brook willows turned greenish gold. Within gunshot of the camp the wild turkey, with red wattles and burnished wings, strutted in frenzies of gallantry and gobbled and tramped his conqueror passion. On a rotted log the cock grouse, loud drummer of nature's army, drummed to his soft meek mate. Up and down the gray trunks of ash trees the delicate little gray-and-red sapsucker was keen to tap the fountains of the sap rising within; on jutted roots the lean chipmunk paused a moment with hungry indecision; and from high-swung summits the gray squirrel, with a single leap, built upon the perilous air his bold aërial bridge. Nature budded and burst forth and sang and leaped and planned for love, planned for life, around the soldiers isolated from love and threatened with annihilation.

Above the camps of carnage stretched the ancient unbroken peace of the heavens, with only some little white clouds drifting far away, like puffs of smoke from unseen cannon, for memories of wars long ago fought out and ended.

CHAPTER II

JOSEPH SUMNER with his eyes now opened and now closed, gave himself up to the spring day, answered its youthful call to him as though the answer were the last he would ever make; then sat up and tore open the envelop. Within were two letters, the longer of which was as follows:

Dear Joe:

Nearly two years have passed since we told one another good-by. It seems more than two years to me, because the whole of my life has passed since then. I have been one person living two lives, one life with Tom and you in the armies, and the other here at home, out in the country, with your mother and myself. Now, after waiting so long for a chance, I am writing as fast as I can. My letter ought to reach you quickly, as it is to go from Union headquarters through the influence of your uncle. He has consented because your mother requested him. That will sound strange to you but the explanation will come later in my letter. In the envelop you should find two letters: the short one she asked me to

A few miles distant a hostile army was hunting them down.

write and this long one, of which she knows nothing. You remember asking me to tell you the truth about your mother. I keep my promise. But I must go back to the beginning and try to remember.

The morning after you left, as soon as breakfast was over and I could get away from the children, I went back to where we parted. No dew had fallen that night to lift the grass. The prints of our figures were still there side by side. I sat down near.

By and by I heard in the distance a long, clear sound, growing louder and louder as it came toward me, and then fainter and fainter as it was carried in other directions, a sound soft and beautiful. It came from the big sea-shell in your home, which, when I was a little girl, I used many times to listen to hear blown like a trumpet of the deep blue ocean. Then the sound was meant to reach your father wherever he might be on the farm and to tell him that he was wanted at the house at once, either because some visitor had come or because something serious had happened. There the sound was now, long and loud and clear, searching the farm for you; telling you to come at once, you were wanted.

At last the echoes died away. They made me realize how truly you were gone. They would never overtake you now nor bring you back.

By and by I saw your mother coming along the upward path through the fields, walking faster than I had ever known her.

My tears dried themselves, and I got up and withdrew a little away from the path to let her pass; for I thought she must be on her way to my mother. But she came over to within a few paces of me and stopped, and then I turned round, exposing to her my red and swollen eyes. They may have told just the story she was looking for.

She did not bid me good morning but asked a question, as though I were in the wrong and it were her right to command me:

"Is Joe over here?"

With resentment at being so spoken to, I replied rudely that you were not.

"Do you know where he is?" she demanded.

With triumph as being closer to you, I said that you had gone South to join the army.

The intelligence staggered her. From that moment, even when she listened to me, she forgot me. I was nothing; you were everything. A moment afterward she started back but a few paces off paused and stood sidewise, with her eyes fixed pitifully on the distant southern horizon. Again she questioned me sternly:

"When did he first tell you he was going?"

I replied sharply that you told me after supper the evening before.

This somehow caused her especial pain. Different emotions began to tear her. She wished to question me further; pride forbade. Then even pride gave way.

"And he said nothing else about his going away?"

As coldly as I could repeat any words of yours, I told her that you had made me promise to take care of her. That was a blow of another kind; she suddenly looked broken; then harshly again she pressed me to answer:

"He left no message?"

I said you had left no message.

"No—good-by—for any one?"

I said you had told *me* good-by; you had left no good-by for any one else.

She turned and walked away slowly. She had come bareheaded and the bright sun shone on her smooth glossy blonde hair. She had on the little gray cape which goes with her gray silk dress, and this made her look all the more like an officer. Straight and without faltering she walked away across the autumn field. I don't know why, but as I watched her, I noticed the loneliness of the blue sky and how frail the butterflies were that started up before her out of the clover and from the field daisies around her feet. One little yellow butterfly caught up with her and rode gaily away on her shoulder.

I am sure, Joe, that we often do a thing, and then at the sight of what we have done we are ready to deny we did it. We are thought to be insincere in our denial; but perhaps, after all, it is not we ourselves who do such things but only some little fault in us. As I watched her, I was ready to deny my unkindness to her and to say it was not myself but my fault that made me unkind. I hope you will think so, too.

That was the longest day of my life. Early next morning, from where I sat I could see that the window-shutters of your room were thrown open. The negro woman washed the windows. They stayed open all day, and I knew that your room was being cleaned and closed. Early the day following the servant caught the horse and rode to town with the basket of peaches, and I knew that your mother was alone, and I thought it time to begin to keep my promise to you. I had lain awake nearly all night trying to resolve to go.

She was sitting on the side porch, rocking and not doing anything. When she saw me she smiled and rose and welcomed me without a trace of the resentment I deserved; and with her old affection for me, as though it were coming back. She looked younger, prouder, aroused to a new happiness in her life.

Soon she asked me whether I should like to see your room. We went up-stairs; it had been put in order. She pushed one window-shutter open. The light of that one open shutter was so dreadful; it was such a reminder that it was of no use to open the others. On your bureau was a little vase of morning-glories which she had gathered at dawn. In the cool midday shadow of the room they bloomed on as though it were night and the stars shone on them. It made me think that often, as the army marched from place to place, you would be sleeping of warm nights out in the fields and morning glories would open about you and the dews would fill them as my tears.

I went back to where we parted

She could not say much, nor I. "Shall we go down?" she asked at length, and went across and shut the one lonesome shutter. The room was darkened, and we were standing near each other; and then I don't know what happened except that I think I screamed, and we were in each other's arms, clinging to each other and sobbing and blinded: friends again through the same love and the same grief and the same loneliness.

I remember you asked me, if I ever wrote, to let you know what took place the day after you left and the day after that. I have tried to do this, and now I must hasten, though I will stop to tell you one more thing. The following day your mother, almost as soon as she welcomed me, said with tenderest pride, "I must show you what I have found in one of the closets." She took me to your father's bureau, where the family papers are kept and brought out your scrap-book. "Look," she said, smiling; "here are all the big battles of the war. He had cut the account of each one out of the newspapers. And look! He pasted the Southern victories at the front and the Union victories at the back! Here in this place he brought together the battles in which his father and his brothers were killed, or were wounded and afterward died of their wounds. He lived through the war in this way, off to himself." As she uttered those words, her face showed things too deep for me: I suppose they were a mother's feelings.

For more than a year we did not know where you were; but then Tom was wounded and taken prisoner

and I went to see him and to carry some things to him, a box of things. And from him we learned in what part of the army you were. He had gathered it from the Southern newspapers which gave lists of the wounded that never found their way North. He told us how you had been wounded and had gotten well and had gone back to the front. You had never written, but we knew you had never had a chance.

I wish my letter ended here but it must be otherwise.

Your mother's health has not been good. It was long before she would consent to see the doctor but when at last he came, he must have advised her, though she told me nothing. But she grew so serious, so quiet after that, with you only on her mind. "If I could only write to him!" she said. "But I cannot ask his uncle to show us any kindness."

A few days ago, as she was lying down and I sat beside her reading the newspaper, she interrupted me as with a great resolve. "Lucy," she said, "you will have to write a letter for me to my husband's brother. Joe wished it and Joe was right. And perhaps the wrong was not all on one side. No, the wrong was not all on one side. Write the letter that I thought would never be written."

Your uncle came at once—came so quickly and generously that I think it must have been true that he was partly in the right. When he left, I was walking in the garden and saw him; he was under the influence of deep and violent emotion. He sent some of his best servants

—your mother's old trained servants—to take care of her and he has driven out many times since. She lacks nothing, she has every comfort. But the comforts mean nothing to her; she wants only you. It is beyond anything I could ever have believed possible to a woman's heart, were I not now old enough to look into my own.

Many times since then she has said to me: "I can not send for him! He *cannot* come. It might disgrace him!" And yet to-day she looked at me suddenly and said out of the deeps of her life: "You must write! He must come to me!"

So this is my letter, which you now understand. It is written and I am at the end of it.

LUCY MOREHEAD.

P. S.—I have not said anything of myself; my letter has not been mine. But can you understand all that I have gone through since you left? Do you know what I feel toward you? Do you realize what the absence has meant and what you have become to me? If all this be not in your heart, I must keep it in my heart.

LUCY.

The shorter letter Joseph Sumner had read first; it ran as follows:

My dear Son:

My hand is not firm as it was once firm. Lucy Morehead writes this letter for me. She has been like a kind good daughter to me since you went away, though

she has had cares enough of her own. She has given me of her very life. You will be happy with her through many years, I trust, and however many they may be, you will never know the depths of her tenderness and goodness. I am not very well, my dear, dear Joseph, and the greatest desire of my life is to see you. Were I stronger, I could wait, for there is now no doubt that the end of the war must be near. But my health is such that I may not risk delay; what I am to do must be quickly done. So will you come to me quickly? I understand only too well what it is I ask and all that it will cost you, but you must come. The cause you fight for will have to spare you a few days to her who gives you to it for all the rest of them. My son, I, too, am soon to fight a battle, but against a power that conquers all nations and that is never defeated. On the eve of that battle I am in great trouble and I wish for life's peace. The war by comparison is nothing to me, the nation is nothing to me. And all that you are as a soldier must be nothing to you. You are but the son of a mother whose need and whose cry is to see you and to speak to you. A great weight is taken off me now that my letter is written. I am happy. You will not fail to receive it and you will not fail to hasten. I shall fight off my conqueror till you reach me.

"Is Joe over here?"

CHAPTER III

IT was dead of night in camp. The sky was clear, the moon was high, and its radiance fell on the forms of the soldiers scattered about on the ground under the bare trees of the forest. The boughs of these, tossed by a roaring March wind, wrought out over the sleepers a ghostly phantasmagoria of battle scenes. One, as it was pushed violently backward and forward, became a shadowy arm that ever hacked with a shadowy sword. Another uplifted saber smote downward and ever was raised and smote again. Near the ground a phantom bayonet perpetually thrust and thrust with no weariness of the fight. Higher in the air an upright bough cast the shadow of a lonely flagstaff from which the colors had been torn. The forest bodied forth over the dreams of the sleepers the imagery of their familiar carnage. At intervals away off on the horizon a

cannon loosed its tongue upon the stillness like a pursuing hound of death. From a near quarter of the sky a shell started to describe its arch and burst at the highest point; from an opposite quarter an answering shell completed its arch and dealt destruction where it came down. Almost under these arches the soldiers slept: life's fire fused in the one flame—to fight and to keep on fighting; nature exhausted to one need—slumber, rest.

Scattered around, the sleeping men lay wrapped in blankets or overcoats as they had one or the other. Some had made pillows for their heads by wrapping their boots in their jackets.

On a single oilcloth two comrades lay side by side, each enveloped in his ragged overcoat. One was dead asleep, one wide awake. He, the wide awake one, had been tossing all night from side to side, wounded with a wound older than the nation, one of the oldest in the world; tossing there and sometimes opening his distracted eyes and seeing not far away, fluttering in the moonlight, beacon of honor or disgrace in the moon-

light, his battle-flag—blue field, red bars, white stars.

At intervals he turned toward his soundly sleeping comrade, tempted to wake him, but as often he had turned away. At last as though in his lonely trouble he must speak to something human, he barely put out his arm from under his overcoat and touched the shoulder of his mate and shook him cautiously. The soldier thus shaken stirred heavily but quickly, as trained soldiers even at the point of exhaustion do, having grown accustomed to being aroused by the sudden call of duty. And instantly he asked:

"Did you wake me, Joe?"

"Don't speak so loud, Fairfax."

"What is the matter? Have n't you been asleep?" Then other questions followed from a friendly faithful mind, slowly returning to full consciousness and to the remembrance of things noted down: "Are you sick? Were n't you sick all day?"

"I am not sick." The voice was leaden with the weight of duty, with responsibility and with

heaviness of soul. "There 's something I must tell you. Come over this way closer."

The soldier thus appealed to rolled over heavily, confidingly, and stretched himself closely alongside his tent-mate, ground-mate, battle-mate. His loyal ear was ready.

The story began in the lowest whisper and with a chatter of the jaws like a chill:

"You know the letter I got this morning?"

The comrade alongside did not like that subject. The fearful manner in which it was brought up now put dread into him. He made no reply but waited for more of the story which was on its way to his ear.

"It came through the lines. You may remember my telling you that I have an uncle who is an influential Union man. He arranged to have the letter sent from headquarters."

The voice broke off because the speaker broke down.

The listening comrade gave no sign.

"The news is that my mother is ill."

Deeper silence followed. The young soldier

called Fairfax had never known that the young soldier called Joseph Sumner had a mother living. Many an hour he had been beguiled by stories about the Kentucky farm and home and about father and brothers once there but never to be there any more. He had listened with ready weakness to a volume of stories about a fabulous Lucy Morehead. Though he believed in Joseph Sumner as he believed in God, he made his own allowance—a natural allowance in his case—for this collection of stories. He credited a fair half of them and understood the half which he did not credit and liked that half best. To him there could be no better lying between comrade and comrade. Now at the first mention of Joseph Sumner's mother he began to understand the silence about her and the absence of stories: she was not dead, as he had assumed, but she had been as one dead to her son. More and more aroused with every detail he heard he waited without comment for the rest of the story. The rest was very brief:

"She has sent for me."

The voice did not seem to proceed from one of the men there in camp. Not from the war, not from the nation. It traveled down from the foundation of human life, from the origin of the oldest duty. And the soldier who listened heard more than duty: distress, a son's long silent love now responding to the call of the sick mother. But such a silence there was! At last this was broken with a terrible whisper, smothered at the mouth itself:

"I have to go."

High overhead in the March wind the shadowy sword hacked its victim, the bayonet thrust at the slain, the flagstaff stood in the silvering moonlight with its colors torn away.

The two comrade youths lay side by side: one limp and helpless as on a hospital cot; the other strong and starting in now to help:

"Are you going to apply for leave of absence? Do you expect to be able to get leave of absence?" The tone in which the question was asked dismissed the idea as impossible. The answer dismissed it in the same way:

"I do not. I am not going to apply for leave of absence. I could not get it if I did apply."

The inevitable question followed quickly:

"Then what are you going to do?"

The quick answer was just as inevitable:

"I am going to walk out of camp."

The soldier Fairfax stretched himself out like a man stiffening in death and rolled over and lay on his other side. Then as quickly he wheeled back again as though brought back by a very close trouble:

"How will you get past the picket?"

"Of course I have thought of that. To-morrow night *you* will be on picket duty."

The words came rushing out hot with indignation:

"And what do you expect *me* to do?"

"I don't expect anything. I don't know what you will do: You will have to decide for yourself. I am going to walk past you and if you think it is right for me to go, I suppose you will let me pass. If you do not, I suppose you will shoot me. I do ask one thing: Don't stop me,

don't bring me back. I don't want to be arrested and dragged to headquarters—for *that!* And if you shoot, don't wing me, Fairfax, don't cripple me, for God's sake! Shoot to kill. I don't want to be brought back wounded and to have all of you walking around me and looking at me—not after *that!* I can see the eyes of all of you on me now, waiting for me to get well enough to be shot at sunrise." He drew up in a knot.

His comrade rolled over again and lay on his off side—to think.

By every path that human beings travel there hangs out a sign with some one word. As each of us advances along his road of life, his sign advances also and moves before him; and soon, if he is ever to become wise, he has grown wise enough to notice it and to read its solitary word. And that word becomes the warning, the menace, the terror of his life. The commander of a vessel at sea has his word; the surgeon forever sees his; a husband has one for himself and a wife knows hers; the judge when off the bench has one

From him we learned in what part of the army you were.

before his conscience; the prisoner in solitary confinement collapses at one on the walls of his cell; the actor walks out upon the stage, wondering whether that night his audience will not deliver his word to him; the singer listens to his own each time he finishes a song; the coal-miner never forgets the word suspended between him and the shaft of light at the foot of the pit; she whose whole sustenance depends upon the use of eyesight shudders at her word, suspended before the long dark tunnel of the optic nerve. Whatever for each of us that word it may be, it marks the last outpost of safety, usefulness, happiness. When we pass beneath the sign and see its word no more, the end of life's profitable journey is not far off, if it be not already reached.

The minds of the two comrades had met at the soldier's fatal word. Neither stirred for a long time. Then the comrade who lay with his face turned away wheeled impetuously over again:

"Why did you tell *me?*" he asked, realizing what a responsibility had been shifted to his shoulders.

"I *had* to tell you! Somebody in the army *had* to believe in me. I could not have gone at all, if I had not left some one of you to believe in me."

The comrade groaned under the weight of the explanation:

"Does believing in you make it any easier for *me?*"

"I don't know. Perhaps not. Perhaps it makes it harder. I can't think it all out. It 's trouble all around."

At intervals the conversation went on in whispers, passing slowly back and forth. Each word became like a judgment on character; the two comrades, now chained together inextricably, seemed to be driven toward a human bog, toward a morass of the horrible.

Once the soldier thus fatally involved in his friend's fate saw a gleam of light out on the black morass. He turned half over and sternly asked a very human question:

"Who wrote the letter?"

"Lucy."

"Was it *she* who urged you to come?"

The reply issued from one too wounded to be wounded any more:

"I said my mother sent for me, Fairfax."

The night wore slowly on: time was a wounded snail. And one was nearly silent now and one did most of the talking. He would talk a moment and stop a moment; and altogether he was like a man carrying a load too heavy for his strength, so that he staggers forward a short distance, then pauses before he can get further. In this way the talking went on:

"I am going out at night. If I try to go out during the day, I should be stopped and I must not be stopped. If I start, I must get away. I 'll have to leave at night. But one thing I will not do: I won't dodge or sneak or hide or crawl. I 'll stand up and walk out and I can't do that except in the dark."

By and by he went on a little farther:

"While I say I am going, I don't see how I *can* go. As soon as I read my letter, I said I would go and I said it all day and I have been

saying it all night. But I don't see how I can ever do it. Still, if it is my duty to go, it is my right to go. And no one can give me permission to do what is right. How can I ask any man to let me do my duty? But to have to go—*now!* When the time comes, I don't believe I can ever do it! I don't: it is n't in me!"

"Even if you get through the line, how can you go anywhere without any money?"

"I have all my Confederate money, half a haversack full. And you remember, when Hardee died he divided his and gave you half and gave me half. Of course I 'll have to get out of my uniform in Richmond and I 'll have to buy me a suit of clothes. For two or three thousand dollars I suppose I could buy me some kind of suit of clothes."

The soldier's humor which is to his mind as his tobacco to his body and stands him in good stead at his worst—a soldier's humor now reached for and lighted its pipe:

"Do you expect to travel on your clothes?"

"That is as far as I have thought. I have n't

Lucy Morehead had come out for her usual stroll in the coolness of the evening.

had time to think it out and I don't know what I 'll do nor how I 'll travel. I may not know until I get to Richmond and find out how much my Confederate money is worth in United States money."

"It is worth about one dollar to a million. Your cravat will cost you five thousand. But get a bully red one!"

The moon was going down. The stars were fading. There was the breath of morn. Here and there vague bulks began to be outlined as human bodies. The young soldier Fairfax turned over with a sore heart toward his comrade:

"When you get back, I may not be here to be your tent-mate. My time may have come before that; my bullet may have found me."

"You may have another tent-mate—and never me any more."

"But suppose something happens to you, man! Suppose you are never heard of again!"

"If anything happens to me so that I never get there, and if another letter comes for me, you

open it and read it and send word back to them that I started."

Those friendships of young brothers-in-arms—they are the bright spot of all armies, after courage. Those loyalties and sacrifices run back through wars to the plains of Troy, to the tent of Achilles and Patroclus.

Once Fairfax spoke quite simply of a matter he had had in his mind all the time:

"When I was coming away, my mother gave me a roll of money and told me I would need it often and need it badly but not to touch it until the time came when I knew I needed it most. Take that. It ought to carry you there; and it will bring you back. And remember, I would have given my life for you, Joe."

"You know that I—" speech failed, words gave out.

Fairfax turned over and muffled his head in his overcoat to get a little sleep as quickly as possible. A moment later he wheeled halfway back again to fire his parting shot:

"All the same, I'd wager what little may be

left of me at the end of the war that you 'll be mighty glad to see Lucy!"

The gray of dawn, like a soft wing, moved over the camp, fanning with light the faces of the soldiers.

Joseph Sumner sat up ghastly and looked around him. All were asleep. His comrade had muffled his face in his overcoat and was asleep with the rest—all true soldiers whatever befell them.

He looked toward the east: it was sunrise: above the crimson of dawn the clouds had grouped themselves like snow-white sheep waiting for their shepherd to lead them along their road.

He thought of the sunlight as falling that day most searchingly on little spots scattered far and wide over the States—little places where soldiers, for forgetting that they were soldiers and for remembering only that they were human, lay in the dirt forgotten, riddled by their comrades' bullets.

That night a trusted picket, stationed on the side of the camp nearest Richmond in the shadow

of thick roadside trees, saw coming toward him from the direction of camp the figure of a man. As the figure drew nearer, he was able to make out that it wore the uniform of the Southern soldier but that it bore no arms. Uniformed but stripped of its soldierly significance, having left behind all the honor it had won from the day it had entered the ranks, it came on—down the middle of the road—on its way out.

The picket stepped out of shadow and stood at attention, facing straight across the road. The figure advanced, facing straight ahead. It passed at arm's length. It passed so close that the breaths of the two mingled, mingled for the last time.

Then it passed on and passed out.

Often she was at her window looking impatiently.

CHAPTER IV

ON the great plateau of central Kentucky the twilight of a warm spring day was falling with its mutable lights and shadows—on grassy uplands of forest farms, mellowed brick homesteads set amid orchards of apple and peach, yards of sweet-breathed shrubs, and gardens for old and hardy and simple flowers.

Lucy Morehead had come out to the fields for her usual stroll in the coolness of the evening. Daily of late she had felt especial need of this hour away from the house. Her responsibilities with a frail mother and a group of healthy, rapidly growing children were always her first concern; and those were the days also, be it remembered, not only of a woman's mastery of her home but of her servitude to the needle. For months, furthermore, her strength had been shared with the sinking household on the Sumner farm near by.

The strain had impoverished her own exuberant vitality and now in order to be of service to the rest she felt the frequent need to be alone. For there are other dews than those of the earth—the dews of solitude; there is an inner twilight for recovery and for rest after the heat and burden of the inner day. It was toward these dews also, toward this twilight, that she had issued forth.

Yet the motive of this self-withdrawal was not wholly generous. As she had quitted the house, she had brought away the secret of an exquisite selfishness; the incommunicable demand of her heart was to be alone with an incommunicable joy. From the hour of the despatch of her letters through the lines to recall Joseph Sumner to his mother's bedside her nature had stood on the tiptoe of a great expectancy. After nearly two years of following him afar in imagination from battlefield to battlefield, she was soon to see him again, standing before her in reality, matured and scarred by war and heroisms. It was this mood, this emotion, that likewise had impelled her to seek separation from the other members of the

family; and it was this that now made the twilight hour out on the meadows, with their thick-scattered buds and sprouting greenness, as the rosy hour of dawn to her—the very dawn of her life.

Ample time for her grave summons to reach him and to bring him had lapsed. Before he could possibly have come half-way home, she had put on her most becoming frock; but having condemned it before the glass, had exchanged it for another which also disappointed; not one she had would do. The windows of her bedroom opened upon a range of country stretching toward the Sumner farm, and often she was at them, looking impatiently. Along the horizon a mile distant a little railway ran from the town to a smaller town. He might come that way and walk across from the station and she would possibly catch sight of him on the far-off treeless pastures. At the busiest hours of the day she had sometimes slipped out of the house and hurried to the crest of the hill, with its little clump of trees,—their old meeting-place,—and from that familiar look-out had searched the yard and lots about the Sum-

ner place and the carriage road leading thence to town; if he arrived by that route, she might see him the moment he reached home.

Most of all at night, sitting beside her candlestand with its bedroom candle, the snowy sheet of her bed turned down from the snowy pillows, she, barefoot, in her snowy nightgown, slowly brushing her long dark downward-loosened hair, had wondered how it would ever be possible for her to be alone with him thus. Yet at the thought that never thus would she be alone with him she forgot to brush her hair, forgot the candlelight flickering in her face.

For the chestnut plaits did not hang down her back any longer; they were heavy braids now, looped this way and that way at the back of her head. Childhood was gone, maidenhood was come, and childhood had taken away with it its simple trust and maidenhood had brought its tenderer doubts. Nature had finished her for marriage, finished her for men, and had thus early set within her the steadfast brightness of a great and noble love. But wherever there may be

brightness, there must be shadows; and while she, gazing into the center of that brightness, beheld undimmed there all the glorious meaning of what a man is, off at one side in ominous obscurity she discovered the sinister image of what a man may be—faithless and forgetful.

Not one message from him had she ever received to let her know that he remembered and was unchanged. Letters from Southern soldiers to their sweethearts did somehow often get through the lines; friends of hers in town had received such letters. None had reached her from him: had he tried to send a letter? He must be well-nigh unrecognizably changed by all that he had gone through: was indifference, was forgetfulness of what had taken place between them at parting, one of the changes? She suffered her jealous imagination to brew bitter draughts from the thought that wherever the army had been, whether in Southern towns or out in the Southern country, it had never been beyond reach of Southern girlhood. He had lived amid patriotic idolatry of the soldiers. When he lay wounded in

the hospital, had not some girl been everything to him as his nurse? Had she not bathed his face, bathed his body, smoothed his pillow, leaned low over to say good night, and, perhaps yielding to a look in his eyes, kissed him?

Thus late at night when full tenderness came, when love as the forerunner softly entered without knocking and locked the door; when he approached so near that his breath was on her face and his searching arms were felt—late at night her doubts also stood around and wounded her. As with a little breath of doubt she blew out her candle, she gave herself this solace, that soon she would doubt no longer; the instant she saw him she would know the truth. For her letter had left him with no uncertainty that she had been faithful; she had in effect trustingly offered herself to him in her only message since they had parted.

It was perhaps these wounds, self-inflicted during these days, that gave to her countenance its subdued and not unpathetic loveliness. The great war of the nation itself had for years been

its plastic molder. For are not the most beautiful generations of the women of any race produced during its long heroic wars? Is it not what women think of distant fighting-men that alone carries their natures to certain loftiest ranges of human expression? Not such beauty as comes to other women from thoughts of God—women whose brows, dedicated to heaven, have the pitifulness of blanched flowers; whose eyes are ever turned toward the dust as though the bold burning sun were too human a light, and these could be opened wide and unafraid only in dark places before the unsidereal radiance of silver lamps. But beauty which answers with frank and full understanding to all there is in the eyes of men, when these come home to them, as their saviors and lovers, from battle-plains where blood ran reddest and fiercest near the very wine-presses of death and the young vineyards of the slain. Is it nature's compensation to women for their passionate unfitness to carry on war that they can yet help to win its victories as the mates of warriors, who after the lapse of all Christian centuries are

still to them the foremost and the fullest of men?

It was the nation's war also that for years had been the one supreme plastic influence on her inmost character. Prayers for hospitals and prisons and trenches and battle-lines, anxiety for two men among those desperate unconquered thousands—first for a brother and then for a lover, too—had called forth a breadth of compassion, a steadfast facing of the terrible realities of life and death, along with strength and fortitude to meet life near at hand, that had reared the structure of her nature almost into a kind of simple and innocent greatness. The consecration of herself to distant fighting-men had meantime been accompanied by an ever-increasing shyness of any man near by. For the farms of that neighborhood during that interval had almost a cloistered privacy: the male youth out of those mellowed brick homesteads were gone to the war. The very paths across the open fields, such as she now walked in, were hedged as with seclusion for virgin souls.

Childhood was gone, maidenhood was come, and maidenhood had brought its tenderer doubts.

CHAPTER V

SHE walked slowly to and fro near the crest of the green hill beginning to darken in the twilight. Once as she was about to turn in her path she saw, appearing suddenly on the backbone of a long ridge situated between her and the deep-golden light of the sky, the figure of a man. She stopped instantly, arrested not by fear but by her virginal shyness of men—the hidden rose of love's self-consciousness. There were no strangers to walk across those fields in those years. This was not a farm-hand, either: no farm-hand possessed the spirit of such a stride. The man moved along the ridge with a quick step and with what was plainly a definite purpose; he knew his own mind and, what is more, though crossing large open fields, he evidently knew his ground and kept to his direction. That led him neither toward her nor away from her but past her at a sharp angle.

His course would about have been along the bee-line from the railway station on the horizon to the Sumner homestead.

She watched him and with each moment of watching there grew in her the feeling that the fulfilment of hope, the fulfilment of her life, was in that man. At the same time a double action set up in her brain: she recognized off there on the hill the familiar in the unknown, the strange in the remembered. It was as though a long-cherished object of memory had returned from the past in larger shape. The traveler moved swiftly forward, darkly outlined against the low gold of the night, and was about to descend a long slope. At that point he must have discovered her motionless figure some twenty yards off to one side of him, for he suddenly stopped as an animal stops when it is rapidly following a trail and forgets the scent in the shock of discovery that it is observed. He stood still, looking intently toward her, and held in his tracks by what he saw. Then he started on again more quickly, as though he would put greater distance between him and

peril. A little farther on he stopped abruptly and wavered with indecision, then wheeled and hurried straight toward her. He advanced to within a few steps and paused like a person checking himself at the limit of all that is to be allowed.

There could be no uncertainty any longer: recognize him she barely could, but recognize she must, so grown and soldier-like, so lean and hungry-looking, so weather-beaten, so anxious, She saw all this instantly in one complete impression. Definitely her mind first realized just his greater physical bulk, his heaviness. And definitely her heart went out on a mission of its own and made its choice of a single feature—the thick, short golden fringe on his lip. Beyond everything else her heart noted, against the background of his pale face, that gold of youth, that pledge of manhood on his mouth, the rush of life's springtime in him.

One swift moment sufficed for all this and another swift moment sufficed in which to realize another change—the change of her forebodings and her dread: he was not coming forward to

clasp her hand; he did not speak to her but stood off at formal distance, looking at her in silence, though evidently troubled by his own conduct. There was no greeting for her even in his eyes. Powerful emotions she did see in him; they were too powerful to be concealed. He struggled with them until he had attained enough of self-mastery to put the rest aside and deal with one. And to this one he gave utterance as though it explained the whole purpose of his presence there:

"My mother—how is my mother?"

For days she had considered how best to break the news to him, should she see him first and should that duty fall to her. But he had destroyed, along with the mood to sympathize, the very language of sympathy; and in what other language to announce to him what she must she did not know. The shock to her own pride broke down all her plans, and she hesitated from lack of presence of mind, from uncertainty.

Upon her silence, as against a barrier causing delay, he threw himself with a kind of desperation:

"I received your letter. I started as soon as I could, the night after it reached me. How is my mother?"

She still hesitated; then, yielding perhaps to some womanly instinct to bring the past into the present and make it an instrument of reproach for the future, she said to him with simple dignity:

"She who was kind and faithful to me can be kind and faithful no more." It was her triumph that she could reproach him with his own mother.

He understood only too well that he had arrived too late. The moment for which he had sacrificed himself as a soldier had moved on unmindful of his sacrifice. Old rude and angry words were never to be taken back now; regret for them would never reach their goal; forgiving eyes never look into forgiving eyes and say how false the worse part of life is to the better part.

"Is my mother dead!" he said with muted breath. In it was the vain struggle to forestall the summons of mortality. And the years of his boyhood seemed to come forward into that mo-

ment; the years that seemed yet to be drained themselves backward into that valley of bereavement.

"Is my mother dead!"

He took off his hat and stood bared and reverent and remorseful, looking toward his home, empty of all he had loved there. She waited in silence behind him, now ready to forget herself and to help him. He turned to her and pointed downward:

"What is the meaning of that?" he asked. "What is the meaning of all that?"

From where they stood candle-lights could be seen in the windows of the house, up-stairs and down-stairs. Outside was the playful barking of dogs. From one grazing lot came the busier tinkling of bells, denoting the sharpened appetite of sheep as the grass cools after the day's heat and dews begin to freshen it. Around the stable sounded the whistling and singing of negroes, through with the feeding. In another lot boomed the mellow clamor of calves just separated from their mothers for the night. From somewhere

arose the miserly dissatisfaction of pigs about their troughs. The whole place, empty and desolate to him, teemed with alien life—people, servants, dogs, other domestic animals.

"What is the meaning of it all?" he asked, appealing to her in bewilderment.

"Your uncle has moved to the place," she answered. "He is to occupy it with his family until you come." Then she added, with unselfish womanly impulse to give him good news: "The will has been read and everything is yours. Your uncle is to stay only till you come home from the war."

He turned again and stood looking down toward his birthplace, now his wealth. There must have swelled in him the fresh feeling of power, of stability in the world, of permanence in time and place, that come to us with the first ownership of property and the undisputed leadership of affairs. Such a moment liberates resources of character which invade even the coming years and attach their possessions to our present lives, our honors, and our peace. He fell into silent

contemplation; perhaps for a few moments he may have passed into bright dreams; then with a slow motion of his hand he pushed the visions away and turned to her.

She had drawn a sealed letter from the bosom of her dress.

"Your mother left this letter with me for you," she said in the manner of fulfilling a duty, "and she asked me to tell you that she had written in it what she had wished to say to you. She felt sure that nothing would keep you from coming. I was to give this to you and to tell you that she was happy."

She walked over and handed the letter to him and stepped back from him. He received it and put it in into his pocket and stepped back from her.

"Your kindness to my mother— But I cannot say anything—" He broke off abruptly and then immediately began again: "I am to start back in the morning; there is no train to-night. I 'll sleep out here." He pointed as he spoke toward the clump of trees not far off. "Will you bring me

She saw, appearing suddenly on the backbone of a long ridge situated between her and the deep-golden light of the sky, the figure of a man.

some supper and leave it there for me? Just a ration: a little bacon, some corn-bread, a tin cup of coffee?"

He asked this as of a stranger; his tone implied that it was nothing that any stranger would not do for any other stranger. Having so made his request, he left it plain that such was the end of their interview and that he waited for her to leave him.

She did not go. She forgot to go. The reasons were understood by her of his not wishing to go for the night to his own house. But the thought of his sleeping out on the ground in the bare field, the pitifulness of it in his condition, in his wretchedness! The old law of the hospitality of the land, which many a time had bridged so much, now bridged the alienation he had forced.

"Won't you come to the house for the night?" she asked, letting it be known, however, that hospitality only was what she offered. "Don't sleep out in the field, on the ground!"

He shook his head and turned half round and

stood silent. She pleaded with him anxiously, tenderly as any woman might:

"Come and sleep in Tom's room; in Tom's bed!"

He wheeled and walked off down the slope toward his house.

To a great love there may sometimes be a species of fascination in cruelty: at least it is not treachery. Cruelty can hurt but it cannot disgust. It may be fought and ended; it does not have to be tolerated and loathed. She stood looking after him; and if he left in her mind a forlorn angered light, it was a clear light: he had been straightforward, clean-cut, above deception. In her letter she had revealed her feelings toward him, had told him that during his long absence she had not changed. Now as plainly as possible he had impressed it upon her as his reply that he had become indifferent.

She watched him walk away unconcerned whether she stayed or went. His assumption must have been that she had gone, for he moved as though already given up to his own thoughts:

his walk was a dirge. It began to dawn upon her that his being there might be an enormous tragedy of some other kind; she began to put together the little impressions he had made upon her in these few minutes, and she reached the conviction that somehow he felt himself endangered by having come. Repulsed, and shy of every man, she could hardly restrain herself from hastening after him, for the sake of all he long had been and of what she had hoped he would some day be. But quite aside from this, she began to think of him as somehow a ruined soldier, a lost man.

In due time she returned with his supper, not with what he had asked her for but with what she thought he should have. Her response was not to his request but to his need. On the grass near the clump of trees where he said he should sleep she spread a lavish banquet. She laid a small snowy cloth, and on the cloth set forth solid sensible nourishment to give him immediate strength. A little coffee-pot, closely wrapped, kept his coffee warm; there was a favorite pitcher for his cream. Then farther away but at arm's-reach, she arranged

abundant sweetmeats which a woman wishes to see the man she loves eat as she would eat them. Lastly, his plate as at the head of the table and by his plate his napkin, all as perfect as care could make it. She looked it over, and saw that nothing was lacking; then lest his coffee get cold, she started to go. With sudden impulse she unpinned her bunch of flowers and kissed them and let fall on them some misplaced tears, and came back and laid them on his napkin, then went away.

This, then, was the end of it all; he was either interested in some one else or, what was crueler to believe, even without the temptation of another she had become nothing to him.

CHAPTER VI

LATE at night she sat at her window, looking out toward where he was. She had not undressed, she had no thought of going to bed—not with him lying out there. Her unasked womanly protective tenderness went out to him while she kept vigil at her window.

An hour passed. That angelic self-oblivion which is pity began to take in her its form of angelic courage. If she could but know that he had come back as he had said he should; if she could satisfy herself at least that he had found his supper! She leaned far out on her window-sill. The night was warm and dry. Stars were thick over the heavens down to the horizon. There was no moon but there was light. No cloud threatened him. When she should go out there in the morning, he would have gone. Whether

to return or never to return, he would have passed beyond life's horizon to her. To have him as hers alone for one night! The joy of being beside him without his knowing!

The warm spring night with its flashing stars and low south wind became an inner voice: "*I understand and I am to be trusted. The heart can show its secrets with me. I am the ear of all that is intimate and hidden and I never betray. What I, in darkness, do, I curtain away into privacy. He is out here with me. He is yours. Come!*"

She noiselessly opened her door and stood in the hall and listened for any sound, with her first fear of those she loved. Then she descended the stairway and slipped out of the house.

As she drew near the crest of the hill, having grown accustomed to the starlight, she became frightened that there was so much of it: if he were awake, he would see her coming. She passed within the shadows of the trees of the grove, trembling and glad to be swallowed up in protective darkness. But a moment later, with

the feet of a frightened hare and with her hands touching the trunks of the trees for support, she made her way to the opposite side and looked out from her concealment.

A little distance off he lay asleep on the ground. Nearer her was his supper. There was light sufficient for her to see that everything was as she had arranged it—his folded napkin, her flowers.

He lay flat on his stomach, sleeping as a man who from exhaustion has thrown himself down in the first easiest way. His arms were crossed under his chest. He had taken off his shoes and coat and had rolled the coat about the shoes, making him his customary pillow. His face rested on one side. Camping and soldiering had taught the first great lesson of such a life: that whatever the day has brought, night must bring sleep, instant sleep, for the sake of what the day to follow may require.

She looked at him a long time and then she stepped out of the concealment of the grove and, softly drawing nearer, sat down behind him.

The starlight was so clear! She followed his outlines; she realized a kind of alien joy in his bulk. Beside all that he was in himself, she embraced all that he represented: he was the glory of battles; there was Southern agony in him, Southern sorrow. He lay there as the flower of the youth of half the nation. Thousands had measured their lengths thus in a sleep never to be broken.

And so, though he was not hers, still, she had her share in him; if he was not her lover, he was yet her soldier, her American. She wanted to see his face. If he awoke, let her vigil be that of a girl beside a soldier who came into her life one day and went out of it the next. Had not some one else watched beside him in the hospital when he was wounded? Did he not lie worse wounded now? She rose and went round and sat down in front of him.

At arm's-length from his face there lay on the grass a little white thing; it was his handkerchief. She put out her hand just to touch something that was his. The handkerchief was wet—wet with

Upon one of the group the attention of the others was concentrated with more than respect.

his tears. She allowed her hand to touch his tears.

Once again her heart noticed what it had claimed first—the signal of manhood on his lip, life's springtime, its flame. There was flame in him for some one. His whole sleeping figure breathed love; it whispered that even now he might be wrapped in dreams of happiness with some one else; they mingled their kisses and caresses while she sat beside them both.

New impulses in her nature began to break down the old forces of restraint, of self-control. She moved nearer to him, with no sound of her breath on the still air. She bent over to fix in her memory the new look of him. Yet the old look was there too; he was a changeless figure of memory, emerging into disillusion. So bending over, she discovered along the edge of his hair a gash-like wound. There had been fighting with cold steel against cold steel. A bayonet, aimed perhaps at his neck, at the jugular vein, had grazed his forehead. Love in her took the guise of compassion: she yearned to lift his head to her

lap, to pass her arms about it, and draw it against her breast—to feel his face against her breast. If she could but feel his face against her breast!

Bitterly she recalled the words his mother had asked her to write. She had demurred but that mother's imperious will had had its way—those words about the years that awaited him and her together. Was this what had offended him? Had he resented being held, as a man, to what had been a boyish pledge? If he awoke and saw her thus beside him out there alone in the night, would he not think that, though rebuffed, she yet claimed him?

She got up softly and went round behind him again and kneeled over him, looking at him. She bent lower and laid her lips on the edges of his hair. Once and again she kissed his hair. Then she kissed his shoulder.

When the sun was high in the empty day, shining on the empty world, she went back.

Everything was as she had arranged it—her flowers, his napkin. Then beside her flowers she saw some sheets of paper, little brownish-white

leaves of paper, which might have been torn from some cheap memorandum-book, perhaps a soldier's diary. They were covered with writing in pencil:

Lucy: It is daybreak. There is just light enough to write by. I am starting back and before I go I must try to tell you everything.

When your letter reached me in camp, I started as soon as possible. I reached here too late but I came as quickly as I could. What I must explain is that I did not apply for leave of absence; it would not have been granted. If every soldier who has been called home by sufferings and privations had been granted leave of absence, there would have been no armies left in the field. I came without permission. But do you know what that means? It means desertion. And you know what desertion means? Court martial, military execution.

If the army had been drawn up for battle and I had been in the front rank, and if by some strange chance my mother had suddenly appeared twenty yards off; if I had seen her there, mortally ill and about to fall and beckoning to me, I should have rushed out of the ranks to her side. Instead of a few yards, I have come hundreds of miles; but the greater distance has not changed my act. To myself I have but stepped out of the ranks of the army and the eyes of the army have been on me

here. What I have done has been done in the open and on the battlefield. I came home for one duty only and I have tried not to let the duty of a son tarnish honor. I have eaten only what I had in camp; I have slept as far as possible as I slept in the trenches.

But, Lucy, I did not step out of the ranks to you. And now do you understand why I have not spoken to you, have stifled all feeling, have blinded my eyes, sealed my lips, nor taken advantage of duty to wrest from it a brief delight? I cannot do so even in this letter. Not here, not now, perhaps never.

Even had I not had strength to do this, one other thing would have determined it. I could not say to you, "I am a deserter," and then have spoken of love. A deserter, a lover—not that!

When I left camp, the troops were on the eve of a great battle, perhaps the decisive one of the whole war. That battle has since been fought. If the despatches in the newspapers are reliable, my command has been cut to pieces, annihilated. And the army is broken and retreating. I am going to overtake it if I can and give myself up. They will shoot me as a deserter or they will give me my place back in the ranks. Which they will do I do not know. They will do as they should.

I tell you all this because I do not wish you to misjudge me. If I never come back, think of me as having tried to do what is right. Perhaps I may have tried too hard. Perhaps all of us, for the sake of one right, are often obliged to neglect some other right. Perhaps only

God can always do right with all things. If we men try to attend to one duty, we have to neglect some other duty.

And believe—what I cannot here write—that I have lived with you devotedly and faithfully, with you only, every moment since we parted. Every night that pillow, as when we kissed one another and said good-by.

Do you know how it was possible for me to reach here and how it is now possible for me to return? My tent-mate, a man I would die for, gave me his money to bring and to take me back. Often I have seen that comrade half starved, half naked in the cold of winter, keeping his money for some greater need, and he gave it all to me. Through him I have some chance of reaching the army before peace is declared and the remnant of the troops is disbanded. If it is all over before I get there, life will be as good as over for me: I shall be the soldier who on the eve of battle gave out. Hope that I may reach there in time either to be pardoned or to be shot.

If the worst should befall me, and if hereafter this friend should ever write to you and you should write to him, tell him that the one thing I spoke to you about was his deed.

And one thing more: my mother's letter brightens my boyhood and opens a straight road to her across the world, whether that road be long or short.

These last few moments here are so strange—the morning light beginning to spread over the fields, the house-

tops in the distance, the first leaves on the trees in spring, the earliest notes of the birds at daybreak. It was these that woke me. The noise of cannon and shell would not have meant anything. I should have slept through them. But the first notes of the birds woke me. At first I was back again in the years gone by, and when I came to myself and found that I was here in Kentucky again—

CHAPTER VII

HE had reached Richmond. It was early forenoon of the fourth of April, one of the days when a nation reaps the sowings of long years and when the man, appointed by history to do the reaping, appears upon the field, facing the laborers of his country and the more distant laborers of mankind.

Joseph Sumner, faint with hunger and loss of sleep and destruction of mental calm, made his way from the station to the streets and found himself under a pleasant sky and inside the smoke-vomiting, flame-vomiting crater of the volcano of the whole war—the ruins of Richmond.

He paid little heed to the ruins. If they affected him at all, they created within him the feeling that he was getting back to familiar scenes of horror. He was goaded by two pressing needs: to buy the first newspaper possible for in-

telligence of where the armies were by this time; and with the few pieces of the priceless silver left in his pocket to get him some food for strength to start out to overtake them. With his paper he hurried to the first near-by eating-place of poor enough character, suitable for him that morning, beggared as he was; and while he waited for his ration to be cooked, he devoured the news. The remnant of the Army of Northern Virginia, in desperate retreat four days' marches distant, hemmed in and harassed on each flank, hacked to pieces in the rear, cut off by scouting parties from its supplies in front—this remnant, while fighting infantry and cavalry and artillery on four sides at once and dragging painfully forward its wagon-train of stores, was yet hurrying toward the place where it might make a stand, toward fastnesses of the mountains. As yet, then, no surrender had taken place. There was exhilaration in these tidings; he drank them as stimulant rather than his helpless coffee; he swallowed them as better nourishment than his bread and bacon. Only four days' march lay between him and his general.

He had not counted the war price of food in Richmond and was forced to lay on the table of his eating-place nearly all his precious silver in payment.

In the street he asked his way to the river and as he walked toward it through the surging crowd, time and again he saw gray-jackets, deserters. They were there in hundreds, the scampering rats of the army long hidden in their holes in Richmond and now come out into the open, all danger passed.

When he reached the river, he asked to have pointed out to him the place where the army had crossed; and this brought him to the bridge, there no longer. He did not know that it had been destroyed, that all the bridges were down; and he stood for a little while looking across at the opposite bank, where the last of the soldiers had moved, covering the retreat, vanishing down the Virginia road, vanishing down the road of history.

One new rough necessity was making itself clear to his mind: that he could not start without money in his pocket; he might fall from starva-

tion on the way. Money he must have and he must find some way to earn it at once; and as he walked along the river-bank, he besought one man after another to give him work. Every one told him that were he a hundred men, he could find work around the burned districts of the city, where merchants had carried their merchandise into the street and now could find no one to move it to places of security. Negroes would not touch it. This was the downfall of Richmond, the downfall of the Confederacy, of their masters and mistresses. Their working days were over!

He was about to leave the river for the town when something caught his eye as of possible use to him—a boat being rowed along; later that boat might row him. He halted and watched it.

Slowly along the river it came, a twelve-oared barge manned by twelve United States sailors. Sitting in the barge were a few men; but the sailors and the men save one seemed to have their respect fixed upon a single person in the barge—the only man who was being ceremoniously rowed. Even seated, he was seen to be long, awkward,

pallid, and rough, an uncouth primitive piece of human workmanship. He sat silent, taking no notice of the men who accompanied him; his piteous eyes were fixed on the doomed city, on Richmond, which he had never seen.

A man who had come up from behind and was standing beside Joseph Sumner, suddenly gave a wild shout and jerked off his hat, and turning to him as though he were a human brother, pointed at the barge and exclaimed excitedly:

"That 's Linclon! There 's the President! There he is! There 's the man who has done it all!"

He ran down closer to the river's edge and stood waving his hat and hallooing. Others took up the cry and voices and forms began to follow the barge.

Joseph Sumner did not move nor lift his hat nor shout—standing spellbound; there was the man that of all the millions alive on the earth he had most wished to see. That man, too, was from Kentucky.

On this pleasant fourth of April of that year

1865, the reaper, appointed by the nation to reap the long sowings of its erring years, was there in simple view of his countrymen. The rowing sailors pushed the great gaunt reaper with the piteous eyes toward Libby Prison.

Early in the afternoon Joseph Sumner was rolling a barrel along the sidewalk. He had engaged to roll barrels of merchandise from a half-burned warehouse to a place near by. He was rolling his barrel when in the distance he heard a roar of voices, a tide of voices coming nearer like a multitude of waters; breaking against the walls of houses and the stones of the streets—the crumbling waters of troubled but triumphant, voices. Then he caught sight of a scene that even in the distance seared his eyes, scorched his mind.

A wild disordered mob of black and white human beings, crowded from the middle of the street out to the sidewalk, against the walls of the houses, came sweeping on, carrying everything before them. This multitude surged and eddied and roared and sang in front of and on each side of and behind a splendid carriage, and sitting in

the carriage was the man he had seen in the barge on the river. Still the same rough, plain, solemn, sallow man there on the rear seat of the carriage, with no smile on his face, no flash in his eyes, no triumph in his jaws, no sense of his own glory; but looking as though the inhumanity of centuries swarmed about his carriage, as though the mistakes of a young nation in a new world laughed and wept in those frantic and frenzied souls. He sat there as though on him rested the eyes of Washington, of Jefferson, the eyes of Cæsar and of Napoleon; and the eyes of Socrates and the eyes of Christ.

Joseph Sumner, as the mob swept past him, was pushed back against a doorway. He clung to it, leaving his barrel to its fate. A strange memory came back to him. When a little fellow at home often he had looked at four pictures in the big red morocco-bound Bible: one of the Garden of Eden, one of the deluge, one of Samson tearing down the prison house, and one of Christ entering Jerusalem. He thought of this last picture now; the palm-branches in the old childhood

picture were the forest of black arms waved in the air; the hosannas in the streets of Jerusalem were the cries of these Africans, heard not long ago near the equator, and now united around the savior of slaves in the United States.

The reaper, savior, rode there in his triumphal carriage, with ten short days of his life to live.

Joseph Sumner looked on, and his whole nature swung away from the scene before him to another distant scene—to the fragment of the army and to his idol, his general, his great American, retreating before this man in the carriage. He may have had some thought of how terrible it was that all the greatness in America could not be on one and the same side; but since it was divided, with rage at what he saw, his heart turned toward his general, a great figure vanishing in the west like a sun of history going down in dark colossal clouds. With the vehemence of rage, he set to work again that he might reach there before the sun of his beloved soldier set, leaving its shadows on the world.

Toward sundown he left off rolling barrels and

took what was due him and went to a cheap eating-place and spent a large part of it for one more ration; then back to the river and across it and then on the track of the retreating army.

And never were miles under his feet so smooth and sweet as those he swiftly traversed. He had the freshness of unwasted strength; he moved as though pushed forward by the hands of dead soldiers, his comrades. Mile after mile, joyously on and on through the gathering darkness; and then he began to realize that he was in truth in the track of ruined fighting-men; for the road began to be strewn with the wreckage and refuse of war and of things good to use but thrown away to lighten the burdens of exhausted troops.

Some miles out he threw himself down at last, somewhere, anywhere, to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

THE sun rose on the next day, a long, long day, and set behind thick woods. It rose on the next, and sank gorgeously behind the rough tops of oak and pine. It rose on the third, the longest day of all, and went down somehow, somewhere. On the fourth day, as it was about to set, its slanting rays fell on the little county town of Appomattox Court House and on the last of the Army of Northern Virginia, about to go into camp on that night of the eighth of April.

But hardly had night fallen when down at the station, among the wagon-trains where three batteries had been planted, as hot and furious a struggle as any of the entire war took place for possession of these guns and to prevent the enemy from striking an artillery-train on ahead and establishing a cordon around the camp. Down there, not far from the headwaters of the little river, knee-deep to a horse, it was fought to the

muzzle with shells and grape and canister, with pistols and the bayonets and butts of Spencers—a small flaming inferno of slaughter.

The guns were saved for the night and there was a lull, a retreat, until daylight; and by and by, on higher ground, in the woods around the village, scattered fires of brushwood began to gleam.

Late, around one of these bivouac fires sat five men. Upon one of the group the attention of the others was concentrated with more than respect, with reverence, veneration: a man six feet of stature in a gray uniform, with three simple stars on his collar; in cavalry boots reaching about his knees; gray-eyed, gray-haired, gray-whiskered, a gray felt hat on his knees. A presence of massiveness and simplicity and calm, a Doric column in an American Parthenon never to be built. Uncrushed, unruffled, with leisure to give attention to the least detail of his desperate situation; in all things as a man who long before this night had counted the cost and now had but to look on and await the inevitable.

Distant eyes had looked on and watched him and all that he did: England, with its memories of Agincourt, of the Peninsular and of Waterloo, studied him; the military strategists of France, with their minds fixed on the arch in the Place de l'Etoile, followed from afar his slightest move; the Prussians, with Frederick the Great behind them, mapped his campaigns for future use on other soils; Russia, with great Peter and great Catharine, took lessons.

The four other men at the bivouac fire were his corps commanders, in council of war to determine whether at daybreak the carnage should go on. At quick intervals their deliberations were interrupted; scouts, staff-officers, aides, came and went. The rough wild spot, a flame of logs and brushwood, an army blanket thrown over a fallen tree, the great oak overhead from the low boughs of which, as from a canopy, long yellow tassels were swinging in the April wind as in military unison and in mockery of war—all made a picture of a chapter of history near its end.

A young staff-officer approached out of the sur-

rounding darkness of the wood, and halted on the edge of the firelight opposite the commanding figure in the group of veteran strategists; he waited to be recognized. Recognition reached him as a mere look of courteous inquiry. The officer saluted and explained:

"General, I am sorry to interrupt you, but I thought it would be better to do so. When the fighting was over down at the station, as the surgeons and ambulance-men were looking about in the darkness for the wounded, they came upon a young man lying beside a dead Union soldier and beside his own musket. He had been struck on the head with the butt-end of the Union soldier's musket and knocked senseless. When he was revived he began to ask to be taken to headquarters. He said he wanted to speak to you."

The officer paused and waited for orders to go on.

"Who is he? What does he want?"

"He will not tell any of us who he is or what he wants. He refuses to answer any questions. He insists that he wishes to speak to you."

The story began to have the complexion of secret news. The unknown might be the bearer of special despatches, of oral despatches. The service of war had its disguises.

"Where is he?"

"Down near the depot by the wagons and the cavalry."

"Have him come."

"I don't know, General, whether he *can* come. He must have been more dead than alive before he got mixed up with the fighting. He has n't the strength to come."

"Can't you aid him to come? Can't you bring him?"

They brought him. A soldier on each side held him up as he took steps but had no strength to stand on his legs. They halted with him as they reached the circle of firelight. Behind them, half shadowed, could be seen the curious faces of other soldiers who had followed. As they halted with him, he put out his arms and not unkindly but resolvedly pushed away the soldier on each side, as though he declined to be helped and would

stand on his own legs. They stepped aside, and he did so stand there before his general, who had never seen him and now looked at him curiously. His hope of these last few days had been realized; he had reached the presence of his captain and his judge. He stood for a few moments steadying himself on his strength, standing up on his will, and in his brain some words of the great man before him began to whirl round and round: "*Human virtue must be equal to human calamity.*" Those words waved before his weakened dizzy brain like letters on a flag, flapping in a storm. Then all at once he pitched over head foremost face downward to the earth.

They lifted him and he sat up and began again to push every one away from him as though he would get up unaided. Some one inquired:

"Has any one any brandy?"

Out of the darkened group on the outskirts a soldier stepped forward with a half-empty canteen and held it to a comrade's mouth. The comrade swallowed some of the brandy. In a few moments he made another effort to stand on

his own feet, and struggled up and did again so stand, a ghastly ruin. The bandage around his head had been displaced, showing the blood-clot in the edges of his hair: a little stream of blood trickled down. More than curiosity, more than interest, more than sympathy had by this time somehow met in him. There was fight in him; there was something of the great in him; and he had something to say, if he could but say it, that was plainly a matter of life and death to him. It was one of the moments, not uncommon in the theaters of war, when, amidst great and wide scenes encompassing immense armies and the fate of nations, something wholly personal comes to the front and everything else waits until it is heard. For in every man's mind and heart, deep down, is perpetual remembrance that armies and nations rest at last upon a man—upon the grit and troubles of the individual.

The questions began in a voice touched with innate humanity:

"What is it you want?"

With a half-wild look the reply was returned:

"I don't know where my command is. I have just reached camp. I can't find what little there is left of my command. Everything is scattered about in the woods, and it is dark, and I can't find my command."

They thought he must be out of his head, standing there in citizen's clothes and foolishly rambling on about his command. Still, during those times a citizen's clothes might be worn for a purpose.

"Are you a soldier?"

The terrific reply was itself a tragedy:

"I don't know whether I am a soldier or not."

In reality they began to think that his mind wandered.

The next question betrayed the grotesque stage the investigation had reached:

"You were mixed up in the fighting. You killed a Union soldier. If you are not a soldier, and if you killed a soldier, you murdered a man. You would have to be committed and tried for murder in the courts of Virginia. You say you are not a soldier?"

The answer was returned with thrilling tenderness: it seemed to come from a vanished glory, a crushed pride, from a lost life:

"I *was* a soldier. I deserted. I deserted at Petersburg before the battle of Five Forks. I went home."

He put up his hand and pushed the bandage back from his bleeding head as though he desired that they should all identify him, get a good look at him. And they all did look at him now with the long fatal silence of soldiers. All at once the council of war became in effect a court-martial.

The next question was in the tone of military routine:

"What is your name?"

"My name is Joseph Sumner. I am a Kentucky soldier—I *was*."

"What is your command, or what *was* your command?"

His mind was not wandering now; it went about making everything clearly understood: he named his brigade, his regiment, his company.

From this point, if there had been present some

He had reached the presence of his captain and his judge.

intelligence higher than human, it might have noted that the questions which followed were asked with the same absence of emotion, yet with a kindlier difference of tone. Some higher intelligence might have remarked this; none there did.

"Why did you desert?"

He shook his head.

"I will not tell you; it would be like an excuse."

"How long were you at home?"

"One night."

"Then you started back?"

"Then I started back."

"Why did you come back?"

"What else was there to do but come back?"

There was a pause.

"How did you get here?"

"From Richmond?"

"Yes; how did you get here from Richmond?"

"God knows; I don't."

There was another pause:

"You refuse to tell why you deserted?"

"I refuse."

"Then what was it you wanted?"

"I wanted to say that I am here to be shot or to be pardoned."

There was a pause.

"How did you get out of camp?"

"I walked out."

"How did you get the money to travel on?"

For a moment some hot vital impulse leaped to his eyes to tell; then as though second thought brought a safer decision he answered:

"I 'd better not tell you that."

"Which side of the camp did you escape by?"

He shook his head sorrowfully.

"I will not answer that question."

"Did you know who was on picket-duty when you escaped?"

"I 'd go to hell before I would answer that question."

There was a pause.

"How do you happen to come in now, at the very last hour?"

"I could n't catch up with you. You had the start on me."

The grim irony of it—a deserter trying to overtake his fleeing general. There were some who would have liked to smile, there were some who did.

The presiding officer of the court-martial quietly pointed to the log covered with a blanket on the edge of the bivouac fire.

"Sit down there."

He motioned to the staff-officer who had spoken to him first and communicated with him in an undertone. The officer disappeared in the direction of camp; the council of war went on with their deliberations. By and by the officer returned, bringing some letters. The great grave central man stood up. All stood. The young soldier staggered to his feet. His general walked into the center of the group and, looking him steadily in the eyes, addressed him:

"Here are three letters. Two of them are the letters that called you home. You left them with your blanket and your arms when you went out. This other letter was written to me by the soldier who was your tent-mate and who was the

picket that allowed you to escape. He sent your letters to me, and he wrote his own letter to me to say that he was on duty and that he had let you pass. He had an idea—we all have—that the next battle he went into he would be killed. He wrote that if you came back he might not be here to speak for you; he said you would not speak for yourself. He was killed at the battle of Five Forks. If he were here, his letter to me would be *his* pardon. Your letters and his letter are *your* pardon. If the nation is ever at war again, I hope that the soldiers in its armies will be made of such humanity and of such manhood as were my soldiers. As soon as you can, join your command." He turned toward the other waiting soldiers. "Help him."

A few hours later, at three o'clock next morning, the carnage began again; but as darkness lifted, there, hemming them in, were solid masses with reinforcements that had arrived during the night, and battle was butchery, the shambles of fighting-men.

A few hours later a great American, a great

soldier, wearing his great white sword, quietly went to meet another great American, another great soldier, wearing his great white sword. The two spoke simply, briefly together, as was the habit of their natures—and there was peace.

Other generals with other armies were in the field and for a while kept the field; but there was peace for the old nation, now become the new nation.

CHAPTER IX

MESSAGES from the front began to travel to homesteads scattered all over the land—homesteads beginning to be stirred with the gladness of another spring.

These were the words sent to Lucy Morehead:

"*It is all over, Lucy. I am coming home to you.*"

The maddening agony of her suspense was ended.

One day in May he came. She had been expecting him for many days and her heart had pleaded that their meeting might take place somewhere outdoors away from the house where she would not betray herself to any eye and where for the first hour they might be alone. So she had brought her sewing, and sat near some white-blossoming brambles and under the dappled

shade of young trees on the hillside, dear to her now by many memories.

It was the middle of the forenoon; and the atmosphere of the day was crystal; and low down over the earth the crystal quivered and palpitated with the sun's flaming ardor. All sounds of living creatures were marvelously rich and clear. The whistle of a quail on the fence of a field of young corn seemed to start beside the ear. The long flute-note of the meadow-lark was piercing—him of the yellow breast. Among the softly swaying boughs over her head a crimson-splashed oriole wove his hempen nest—of native Kentucky hemp—and warbled as he wove, singing to his work. The grass all about was thickly starred with low earth-lapped dandelions. Near the moist roots of the white-flowered bramble at her back curious-eyed wild blue violets leaned from their green lattices—not too far.

Amid all this, the young leaves dappling her hair and face and shoulders, she sat and worked and waited. She was white-frocked; her youth and her innocence were like the whole blue of the

sky. The heat of coming noon began to flush her skin; the long lashes were ready to hide her eyes lest he see too much. Often she lifted these and watched for him: he would be told at the house where she was to be found. Then indeed and in truth she did at last see him coming, swiftly, straight to her, his eyes fixed searchingly on the half-hidden spot where she must be.

She saw him: there was no mistake now, no misunderstanding, no waiting, no obstacle; there he was, coming to her; life's realities with him began at last—love's mysteries.

She dropped her work to the grass at her feet and rose and started away from him, driven by some blind instinct that the ordeal of their meeting would be intolerable joy. She heard the march-like swish of his feet through the bluegrass now rising to its seed. The sound came closer and closer, and she turned with love's terror to face him: white frocked, under the blue of the sky, finished by nature, waiting for life, waiting for him.

He came on toward her with no smile, no mo-

One day in May he came.

tion of his hand, no play of the eye—he came and opened his arms and took her in his arms in silence. He passed one hand behind her thick dark braids and folded his fingers about her head and turned her face toward him and so held her, looking at her with the heart-hunger of years, with life's flame on his mouth. Across her lips a quiver ran—their weakness, their strength, life's surrender, life's consecration.

In silence out in the sunlight, under the whole blue sky of their youth and their innocence, their lives met.

Thus already over the exhausted old nation the union of youth for the long building of the new nation—mighty nation as it is now with its greatness all on one side.

For there was peace.

THE END

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